

THE USEFUL LIFE OF MANSFIELD FRENCH:
A MODEL OF MULTIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

VOLUME I

A THESIS-PROJECT
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To Kathy LaCourse and Maureen Awad,
worthy descendants of Mansfield French.

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PREFACE

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's doctor of ministry track entitled *Revival and Reform: Renewing Congregational Life* examines God's work of spiritual revival and social reform in American history in order to discern principles that enable ministers to align themselves with his renewing work in the present. Imagine my amazement when two sisters, dear friends of my family since my childhood, told me about their great-great-grandfather, Mansfield French, a clergyman who conducted revivals in Ohio that generated amazing conversions, who ministered to abandoned slaves in South Carolina, and who (they claimed) persuaded Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. I could not believe my ears: I was about to study revival and reform, and here was a forgotten historical figure who did both at a high level in one lifetime. I knew at that moment that French was to be the subject of my thesis-project.

I began by reading the short biography of French in the genealogical history written by his grandson, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut*. My original plan was to mine French's life story for principles by which a single individual could engage in conversionistic evangelism and social action at the same time. French's life story proved uncooperative, however—as I dug into his surviving papers it seemed like he darted sharply from evangelism to abolitionism and back again. (It was not until much later that I discovered the period that the two pursuits coalesced from the early 1850s to the early 1860s.) So I took a new approach. After a year in French's papers, what I found most fascinating about him was the incredible diversity of what he did. How could one man do so many, different, important things in

one lifetime? What would it take for *me* to have a career like that? The pursuit of an answer to the former question (to generate hints toward the latter) determined the shape of this work.

Along the way, a third angle on Mansfield French opened up. French was the living bridge between an amazing assemblage of nineteenth-century personages and movements. The further I explored, the more two movements emerged above the rest: the Holiness Movement and abolitionism. Mansfield and his wife Austa French were living proof that those two movements overlapped. This alone was not breaking news. The overlap has been described (to a point) by at least two scholars from the Holiness¹ side, but it has never to my knowledge been fully explored from both sides by the same historian, especially as it extended—and disintegrated—during the Civil War. Although I do not claim to do anything quite that ambitious in this work, I do suspect that the story of Mansfield and Austa French is a microcosm of the marriage and divorce of Holiness and abolitionism in nineteenth-century America. I hope to repackage this thesis along those lines for publication.

All scholarship builds on what came before, and in addition to this study's value for ministry, I hope that my work extends several trails blazed by other historians.

First, in the mid-twentieth century a pair of friends and colleagues, Timothy L. Smith and Melvin Easterday Dieter, discovered their mutual wish to write the history of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement for a scholarly audience. Smith went first in

¹ In this study, I write “holiness” in lowercase to refer to a spiritual experience and state described by the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and “Holiness” with a capital “H” to refer to a religious movement that championed that experience and teaching. Mansfield and Austa French often capitalized “Holiness” in either situation, and modern historians tend to write it in lowercase.

1957 with his landmark *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (which inspired the name of this D.Min. track), and years later Dieter followed in 1980 with *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*. Smith's work focused on the interrelationship between perfectionistic revivalism and progressive social causes in the 1840s and '50s while Dieter traced the rise and progression of perfectionistic revivalism until the breakaway of Holiness churches from mainline denominations at the end of the century. Both books are perfect homes for a discussion of Mansfield and Austa French, but although both authors used the Frenches' magazine *Beauty of Holiness* in research, the Frenches themselves were virtually absent from their works, shrouded in obscurity.²

Second, in 1964 Willie Lee Rose published her seminal *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*, the fascinating story of the mission to "contraband" blacks on the South Carolina Sea Islands launched in 1862. The impact of Rose's work and how she portrayed Mansfield French is discussed in this study in chapter five.³ Suffice it to say that my study fills an important gap in that wartime drama of the beginning of emancipation by providing a deep, full, and complex portrait of perhaps its most controversial character.

Third, in his afterword to a 1998 collaborative volume of essays entitled *Religion and the American Civil War*, James M. McPherson lauded the effort and challenged

² Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Evangelicalism 1, Donald W. Dayton and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), see esp. p. ix.

³ Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). See pp. 581-82 below.

scholars to reexamine the war from the perspective of the religion of its participants and the religious institutions engaged in it. Several important works followed along these lines in ensuing years, including George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* in 2010. I hope that the present work continues this fruitful trajectory of research.⁴

Fourth, one of the great problems in American religious history is how and why the socially progressive evangelicalism that dominated Northern Protestantism in the mid-nineteenth century evolved into the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. The careers of Mansfield and Austa French intriguingly suggest how the division began during the Civil War, although it took another generation for it to become visible and the generation after that for it to result in schism. I intend to posit a hypothesis for further research along these lines in the published version of this work.

⁴ Randall M. Miller et al., eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Cf. Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006).

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First to be thanked are Kathy LaCourse and Maureen Awad, who introduced me to Mansfield French. Kathy also spent countless hours scanning a vast portion of the hundreds of documents pertaining to him in the French Family Papers at the Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center in Syracuse, New York so that I could transcribe and work with them at my home in Pennsylvania. Without her labor this project could not have happened, to say the least.

Maureen and her husband Jim hosted me in my research trips to Syracuse, as also did Matt and Rachel Godard. Mark and Jan Wise did the same in the Columbus, Ohio area. The hospitality of all these friends (extending beyond their guest rooms to lending iPads and cars!) is much appreciated.

Numerous institutions provided me with the treasures of their archives, study space, or other research help, including Beaufort County, South Carolina; Bowdoin College; Columbia University; Cornell University; Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton (Mass.) and Charlotte; the Hollidaysburg Public Library; the Library of Congress; Marietta College; the National Archives of the United States, Washington and College Park (Md.); the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; the Pennsylvania State University, University Park and Altoona; the University of Rochester; Syracuse University; and the Wisconsin Historical Society. Certain institutions and the individuals who work at them require special mention, however. Thanks to Dominique Dery of Duke University for outstandingly kind and generous assistance. Christopher Harter of the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University helped me on multiple

occasions through the long research process. I cannot sufficiently thank Carol Holliger of the Archives of Ohio United Methodism at Ohio Wesleyan University. Carol took a genuine interest in this project and went beyond helping me to the resources of her archives. She also patiently explained the various ranks of ministers in antebellum Methodism and its intricate ordination process, answered my questions about French's relationship to Ohio Wesleyan University and the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and introduced me to the invaluable trove of scanned periodicals in the American Periodicals Series. Finally, this project simply could not have occurred without the Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center and especially my childhood friend Sarah Kozma. Sarah allowed Kathy LaCourse and me unthinkable freedom to scan an immense volume of documents for a pittance so that I could work on them remotely. I sincerely hope that the digital record of those documents and the transcription/index that I created at least partly compensates the OHA for the priceless value of those documents to me.

Another institution that critically supported this project was Mount Aloysius College. Sr. Helen Marie Burns deserves my sincere gratitude for selecting me as MAC's Visiting Scholar for the summer and fall of 2014 and granting me precious office space on campus where I could block out all demands but research and writing. I am also deeply grateful for the valiant efforts of Shamim Rajpar, whose interlibrary loan skills I taxed to the limit but who never failed to come through.

I wish to thank my doctoral professors, Garth Rosell and Bob Mayer, for believing in this project and getting as excited about it as I am. Thanks also to the staff of

the Doctor of Ministry office at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Thanks to my readers, Dan Buttry, Jay Kesler, and LeRoy Lawson, whose reflections constitute the appendix to this thesis. I am sincerely grateful that they devoted a large amount of time to read this work, and I hope that it proved to be worthwhile to them in at least some measure. What a privilege to have the opportunity to converse with such accomplished multivocational ministers about calling and career. If I achieve a fraction of what they have when I reach the later stages of my ministry, I will be very satisfied.

Thanks to others with whom I dialogued while I was trying to get my bearings at early stages of the project—Wallace Alcorn, James Cornelius, James M. McPherson, and Gil Wilson.

Thanks to my beloved parents, Daryl and Gloria Hartman, and parents-in-law, Steve and Becky Wise, for their unceasing love, support, pride, and prayers. Thanks also to dear friends Ted Kluck, Joe Surin, and Bill Mackey, who not only stood beside me through every stage of this project but who also showed the most selfless and compassionate understanding when I drew away because of immersion in the work. I am happy to be coming back.

I cannot adequately thank my church, the First Baptist Church of Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania for believing in me, cheering for me, supporting me (including in this program) financially, buying me a new computer when mine died a few weeks before my due date (!), and amazingly putting up with the embarrassing amount of time I took from them to devote to this project. In the thick of the work, especially in its final stages, I

wrestled—and still wrestle—with what it means to our walk together, but I sincerely hope that this program has shaped me to be a better shepherd and that they are the better for the sacrifice we both put into it. This program came at the right season for our church, and it is ending at the right time as well. I am looking forward to going all in to the vision God has for us.

If words fail when thanking the aforementioned, then it is almost folly to try to thank my children Jack, Orphie, Arwen, and Israel, and my wife Kelly. My younger children do not much know who their father was when he was not working on a doctorate. All of them have put up with much distance, stress, and vacant facial expressions on my part, and they have done their best to make our home a place where all of us can work and live. We have had some wonderful times in the past three years as well, but I am eager for more. A combination of maturing ages of us all and my mental absence has made my heart grow fonder. As for Kelly . . . I simply cannot imagine that there is anyone more invested in, supportive of, and proud of her spouse's achievements. Interestingly, Austa French comes close. I pray that I become as devoted to seeing my wife flourish in her calling as Mansfield was to Austa, albeit with no misjudgment and discord in future years.

Finally and most importantly, I thank the God of Mansfield French, who knew French, me, and this project before either of us were born, and who ordained and enabled it in ways and for purposes that still mystify me. May holiness and Universal Freedom prevail.

ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA
AOUM	Archives of Ohio United Methodism, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH
<i>BH</i>	<i>Beauty of Holiness; Devoted to the Sanctity of the Heart, the Life, and the Sabbath</i> (later known as <i>Beauty of Holiness, in Heart and Life</i> ; then <i>Beauty and Power of Holiness, in Heart and Life</i>)
FFP	French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY
M619	Letters Received by the Office of the Adjutant General, Main Series, 1861-1870 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M619); Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94; National Archives Building; Washington, DC
SPC	Salmon P. Chase Papers, 1775-1898, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project examines the life of Mansfield French (1810-76)—educator, clergyman, revivalist, publisher, abolitionist, army chaplain, Freedmen’s Bureau officer—as a model for multivocational ministry, defined as “having multiple vocations across a single ministerial career.” The thesis is a biography focused on how French transitioned through a succession of occupations, concluding with a distillation of nine external circumstances and eleven personal qualities that enabled the wide range of French’s diverse and influential accomplishments. This list serves as a basis for comparative biographical studies to constitute the first step toward an applicable theory for the formation of multivocational ministers.



Figure 1. Portrait of Mansfield French by Louise C. Carpenter. The painting is at Wilberforce University; this facsimile is in the French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY. The painting is based on a photograph of French whose whereabouts are unknown; it appears in Mansfield Joseph French, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1940), 70. M. Joseph French dated the photograph circa 1855. Another possible date is 1864, when French is known to have had his photograph taken. See H. French to M. French, July 19, 1864, FFP.

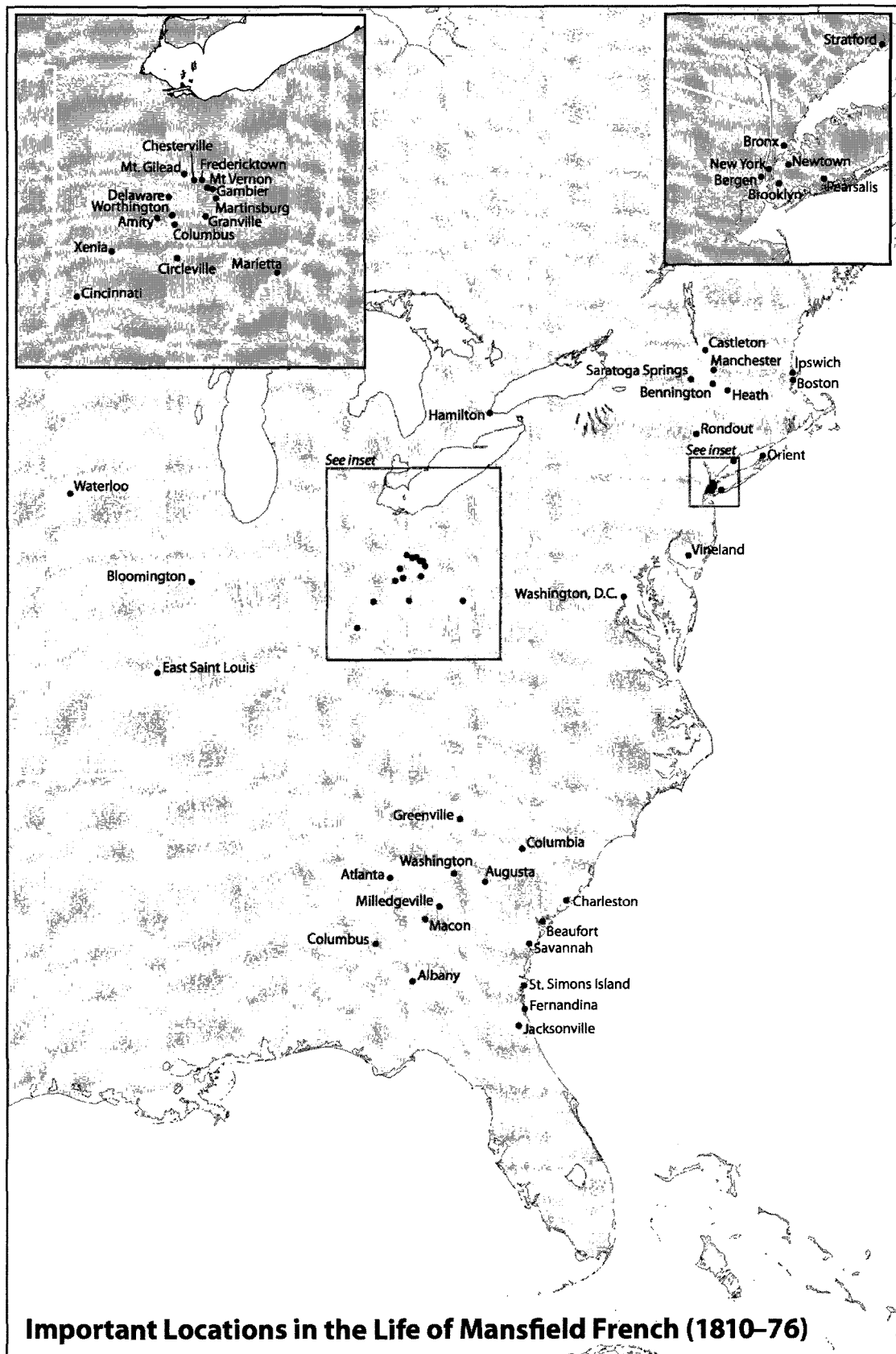


Figure 2. Important locations in the life of Mansfield French.

INTRODUCTION

All I have and all I am or may be, I desire to throw into the scale of usefulness.

—Mansfield French (1831)

What the Lord may open before me I know not. I desire to be more holy & useful to my family, the church & to the world.

—Mansfield French (1852)

When the Reverend Mansfield French lay dying of heart disease in 1876 at the age of sixty-six, he may have looked back on a remarkable life. He had played crucial roles in the founding or early development of three institutions of higher education that still exist today, had overseen the education of hundreds of antebellum women and thousands of freed slaves, had seen hundreds converted to faith in Jesus Christ and hundreds more profess entire sanctification in response to his preaching, with his wife Austa had promulgated the doctrine of holiness among thousands of Methodist readers, had secured authorization to enlist and arm five thousand escaped and abandoned slaves before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, and had overseen the legalization of thousands of freedpeople's marriages. These are merely endeavors in which he succeeded; they do not include his failed attempts to secure permanent title to parcels of confiscated plantations for freedpeople, to be elected a United States senator, and to win American diplomatic recognition of an independent Cuba. Any one of French's accomplishments would be, to most persons, the evidence of a full, meaningful, and productive life. They represent a variety of social and religious movements, but French's role in each was not prominent enough to earn more than a passing mention (if that) in histories of those movements. Historiographically, his name falls deep in the shadow

behind such of his acquaintances as Mary Lyon, Phoebe Palmer, Salmon P. Chase, Robert Smalls, Oliver Otis Howard, and Robert K. Scott. Nevertheless, what sets Mansfield French apart from them all is the astonishing variety of his activities: it is simply remarkable that one man combined such diverse useful activity into one lifetime.

Therein lies the historical significance of Mansfield French. It is not only the small but significant parts he had to play in the spread of Yankee education to the Old Northwest; the ongoing churn of revivalism in Methodism in the late Second Great Awakening; the coordination of that revivalism with social reform, particularly abolitionism; the early decades of the Holiness Movement; the freeing, educating, marrying, arming, and settling of slaves during the Civil War and Reconstruction; and the radical Republican agenda in American politics. French's significance to history is the man himself as the personal bridge among all these movements and their principal characters.

However, French's significance for *ministry* lies in the question of whether another minister may emulate him by accomplishing as much in as diverse an array of fields as he did—whether French may be imitated as a “model of multivocational ministry.”¹ The thesis to be developed here is one step in the direction of answering that question—specifically, this is an investigation into how Mansfield French did the diverse, world-influencing things that he did. Some prolegomena about method, motive, and

¹ The term “multivocational” is rarely used and variously defined jargon that I am appropriating for my own purposes to denote “having multiple vocations across a single career.” It is not an amplification of the ministry term “bivocational,” which refers to an active minister who simultaneously holds a full-time job in an occupation outside the church. What I mean by “multivocational” is diachronic, not synchronic. Of course, a multivocational minister may be bivocational some of the time. Though not active in parish work at the time, French himself held down two jobs when he was publishing *Beauty of Holiness* while raising funds for Wilberforce University.

assumptions require examination before this deceptively straightforward investigation begins.

First, this is an investigation into the *influential* things that French did, not the *important* things that he did. The distinction between “influential” and “important” may be illustrated by the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. In that chapter the author delineates a sweeping, though partial, list of deeds recorded in the Old Testament that can justly be considered important because they exhibit the crucial virtue of faith. Faith is what God commends (v. 2); it is the thing that *he* finds important. Some of these acts of faith greatly influenced people and events in their time and would have been noted as such by these saints’ international contemporaries—for example, “By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if on dry ground, but when the Egyptians tried it, they were swallowed up. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after the people marched around them for seven days” (vv. 29-30).² Noah’s faith to build his enormous box of preservation is arguably even more influential. However, most of the acts of faith listed in Hebrews 11 had no notable influence on the world around the actors. Abel offered a “greater sacrifice” than Cain’s (v. 4). “Enoch was taken up so that he did not see death” (v. 5). Abraham and his family migrated as nomads to and through the promised land, “[dying] in faith without receiving the things promised” (v. 13). Indeed, for as many as influenced the world when “they conquered kingdoms, administered justice . . . became mighty in battle, [and] put foreign armies to flight” there were at least as many who “went about in sheepskins and goatskins . . . destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (the world was not worthy of them); they wandered in

² New English Translation. All Scripture quotations after this paragraph are taken from the King James (or “Authorised”) Version of the Bible.

deserts and mountains and caves and openings in the earth” (vv. 33-38). For all these heroes, influential or not, what they did was important to God, and they “were commended for their faith” (v. 39). In each case, their act of faith either involved making an offering of worship that pleased God (Abel being the exemplar) or it preserved or extended the people formed by God to inherit what he promised. In the latter case the deed would actually prove to be immensely influential centuries later but would have been ignored by the chroniclers of their time. Rahab is a telling example; the importance of her escape from destruction seemed to have little impact outside herself and her family, but it eventually mattered a great deal, as it was one of the essential links in the genealogical chain that led to the Messiah (Matthew 1:5).

With this understanding of what constitutes importance, it becomes evident that we simply do not know what important things Mansfield French did, nor can we. Only God knows what are the really important events of his life, what things he did by faith as a pleasing offering to God or to preserve God’s people.³ I could only claim to examine French’s important achievements if I claimed prophetic insight by which to do so, and I do not in this project. What remains to be examined then are French’s *influential* achievements. These are his accomplishments which had an evident, significant impact on people around him and later generations, either directly or mediated through institutions that French had a large hand in shaping. There is likely overlap between French’s important deeds and his influential ones. In the end only the important ones matter, but since his influential deeds are the only data we have to work with in the

³ It should be noted, however, that French himself was convinced that his vigorous advocacy for the slaves and ex-slaves in South Carolina was precisely preservation of God’s people. See pp. 280-86.

present we will use them as a stand-in for the data we do not have because of our limited knowledge and perspective.

Second, French's influential activities serve as the basis for value judgments about his life in the present work. These judgments are limited in scope, however. I intend to be restrained in evaluating the correctness of French's theology and the justice of the governmental policies he favored. My focus, rather, is on how French got into positions that made his influential activities possible. At times this analysis will indeed involve theological, moral, or political critique, but the end sought is an evaluation of French's vocational "usefulness." The same approach applies to French's personal life. French's concerns for his family and his personal finances occupied an enormous amount of his thought and activity as exhibited by the volume of his preserved papers devoted to each. For this study, it is not my interest to evaluate French as a husband, father, householder, and investor. Nevertheless, these roles and relationships affected his vocational opportunities, choices, and influence at times in profound ways, and as such they will be explored here.

Third, this study is not just about French's influential accomplishments per se but about their diversity, which, as I claimed above, is what makes him worth studying. Therefore, there is an emphasis in this study on French's vocational transitions—what made possible the new opportunities that he received and how he came to seize or decline them. This also requires by implication a consideration of French's decisions to conclude or abandon current assignments in favor of new ones. This does not mean that French's activity through the heart of these assignments will be ignored—far from it. To the

contrary, Mansfield French's life and accomplishments are so little known (even among historians, much less professional ministers) that a large amount of biographical material is necessary to orient the reader to the subject. It simply means that, for example, how French came to land in Beaufort, South Carolina as a missionary of the National Freedman's Relief Association is in the last analysis more important to this study than how he administered the ex-slaves' schools on the Sea Islands once he got there.

Fourth, as I consider "how" French did what he did, I assume two contrasting but complementary sets of influences. The first set comprises the *external circumstances* surrounding Mansfield French that made his career transitions and influential activities possible. These conditions may be grouped into a number of areas:

- Nurture (i.e., family of origin)
- Religious (including theology, the social standing of his religious communities, form of worship, and shape of spirituality)
- Demographic (including population increase and migration)
- Community (type—e.g., rural, small-town, or urban—and predominant culture)
- Economic (both at the macro level and in his own household as an economic unit)
- Educational
- Political
- Relational (i.e., who French knew and how he met them)

The other set of influences comprises French's *personal qualities* that both disposed and equipped him to make his career transitions and accomplish his accomplishments. These

qualities may be features of his:

- Temperament/personality
- Cultural heritage
- Habits
- Values (including beliefs, considered as principles that he valued)
- Body (physique, health)
- Talents
- Social standing⁴

In short, my philosophical basis for this study is that each person possesses a range of qualities in all aspects of their being. Some of these qualities are native (“inborn”) while others are formed by the person’s external conditions through time. External conditions also make possible a limited range of opportunities and shape the probability of success in those opportunities for the person who encounters them. When I investigate “how Mansfield French did the diverse, world-influencing things that he did,” I am seeking to know what conditions presented the opportunities that French encountered and what personal qualities (including those formed in him through earlier conditions) disposed him to seize these opportunities and enabled him to succeed at them. The result of the study is a list of the conditions in French’s world and the qualities in his life whose intersection enabled the diverse array of French’s accomplishments.

Importantly, the final era of French’s life was marked by his failure to make an adequate transition from labors on behalf of freedpeople to a new phase of fruitful

⁴ I am considering French’s sex, race, and ethnicity indirectly as they operate through the types of qualities listed.

activity at a similar scale of influence. Those years provide an intriguing and helpful alternative scenario in which we may explore what conditions and qualities were lacking in French's life then that had been present before and what new conditions may have inhibited French from gaining, seizing, and succeeding in opportunities in the last part of his career. To take this latter point one step further, it is important to note that Mansfield French, like any human being, was not a static individual, nor was he living in a static world. For this reason, we may find that that the interplay of qualities and conditions that propelled him through one vocational transition may be entirely different from the set at play in another. Moreover, characteristics and conditions that may have been useful at one phase of his life may have become counterproductive in a later phase. Such development will be carefully noted in the conclusion, but recurring qualities or conditions that facilitated French's multivocational career over his whole life (or close to it) will be noted also.

The philosophical framework described here may strike some as deterministic, but this work does not rest on a thoroughgoing determinism, nor does it require a belief in determinism from the reader. The idea that conditions limit choices ought to be self-evident. For example, regardless of one's belief about human volition, it is easy to admit that French's acquaintance with Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase was a necessary condition for French to travel to Port Royal Sound to investigate the condition of the escaped and abandoned slaves there.⁵ As for personal qualities, as long as the reader grants that such qualities enabled French to perform certain tasks that he would not

⁵ See pp. 213-14.

have been competent to do otherwise and that his qualities had at least some influence on how he made decisions, the thesis and its results should hold together. This study does not intend to demonstrate necessity in French's actions, only possibility (and, if we are fortunate at times, probability).

In addition, I assume that God interrupts the ordinary flow of cause and effect to alter circumstances and individuals' qualities; these unexpected, supernatural occurrences may be called miracles. If miracles happen, it is entirely possible that one, a few, or even many occurred in Mansfield French's life. Indeed, I believe that many of the professed conversions that took place under French's preaching were truly miraculous. Even more important for this study, I personally believe that the most significant vocational transition in French's life involved the miraculous.⁶ Examining French's conditions and qualities does not close off the possibility of God's supernatural work to interrupt the natural course of events. But neither does the possibility of the miraculous make an investigation of the nonmiraculous in French's life worthless. My few hunches about God's miraculous intervention are just that—hunches—and I refrain from employing the miraculous to explain events in this study, even if I personally believe them to be miracles as I have defined them. Rather, the matter of this study is that for which I can present historical evidence. This matter includes the circumstances surrounding Mansfield French and his personal qualities as influential forces.

My fifth and last prefatory note is that the activities of Mansfield French's career may be grouped into four areas of vocational interest:

⁶ See pp. 109-23.

- *Education.* French's direct involvement was mostly in upper-level education, and some of the institutions of this type that he was involved with continued for generations after he left them.⁷ However, the widest impact he had during his own lifetime came in facilitating primary education of thousands of uneducated children and adults. French's educational activity consisted more in administration and institutional development than in teaching.
- *Spiritual awakening.* French generally functioned in this area as a traveling evangelistic, revivalistic preacher, although it was as a young schoolteacher that he gained his first revivalistic success.
- *Religious literature.* French's interest in this field includes popular spirituality, social ethics, and religious journalism. At first French was engaged much more as a publisher than as a writer by means of his magazine that championed entire sanctification. The pieces that he wrote for various publications during the Civil War, however, were more widely circulated.
- *Just governance.* French held radical political views long before he got involved politically with the "radical" faction of the Republican Party with which he later associated. War swept French's concern for social justice from the alienated pacifism of his middle years to militarism and state-led social revolution.

I share French's interest in each of these vocational areas. This has surely affected my selection of data in this study, not to mention the selection of the study itself.

However, in each area I locate myself in a somewhat different vocational function or

⁷ Marietta Institute of Education (reconstituted as Marietta College in 1835), Ohio Wesleyan University, and Wilberforce University still exist today.

ideological position than French held (not least, though not only, because I do not live in the same world or face the same challenges that he did).

When Mansfield French was a young schoolmaster in Heath, Massachusetts and Marietta, Ohio, the fervent ambition to be “useful” was in common circulation among his students and friends. Elisabeth Thompson thanked him for the “unaffected assertions of kindness and advice . . . [t]he influence of which, I hope will render my future life more useful.” Lucy Hastings was confident that “the good advice you have daily given me; will not be in vain, but that it will serve, to make me more useful, to myself, and to those with whom I may associate.” French’s teacher James Ballard gave him this benediction: “May the Lord smile on you & bless you & purpose you for great usefulness in the world.” His former student S. L. Matthews bemoaned that

I have, ever since I have made a profession of religion, been so, so enamoured with transitory objects, so bewitched by the allurements of study, so elated with the idea of clinching the hill of Science, that I have often lost sight of the object towards which, all my efforts should be directed—viz. of preparing for usefulness to the church and the world and labouring for the good of immortal souls.

French’s friend John Kendrick stated his pleasure that “the way is opened which enable[s] me to spend a useful life. This ought to be our great aim.” French himself shared the sentiments of his circle, writing to his betrothed Austa about his school in Marietta his hope that “we shall no doubt be able to raise up one of the first Institutions in the country. We shall aim at rearing a useful one, if nothing more; and if it be useful, God will certainly make it a great one.” But this confidence came with concern and self-doubt:

“Could I only divest myself of selfishness, and live not altogether for this world I should then be more sure of our success. All I have and all I am or may be, I desire to throw into the scale of usefulness. But, my dear Austa, the world, the flesh, and a love of self, make this a difficult matter.”⁸

This study is an examination of how Mansfield French lived up to the ideal of usefulness to which he aspired as well as how he fell short, organized according to four phases of French’s life. Chapter one examines the heritage and surroundings into which French was born in Manchester, Vermont and his years as an evangelical Episcopalian educator in Massachusetts and Ohio. Chapter two begins with the pivotal years 1843-44, when French became a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church in central Ohio. This chapter describes how he combined evangelistic itinerancy with university fundraising and publishing a Holiness-oriented magazine which led to his relocation to New York City. Chapter three begins with French’s abolitionist activism and government service from his first foray to investigate the plight of contrabands at Port Royal Sound, South Carolina in 1862. It extends through his work as a missionary administrator, army chaplain, Freedmen’s Bureau officer, and candidate for U.S. Senate in 1868. Chapter four examines French’s difficulty making a successful transition to meaningful labors after losing the election, a period that included a fruitless fundraising effort, advocacy for Cuban independence, a smattering of revivalistic preaching stints, and endless financial troubles, culminating in six quiet years of parish ministry on Long Island. In this chapter

⁸ Elisabeth Thompson to M. French, April 7, 1830, French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY; Lucy S. Hastings to M. French, April 7, 1830, FFP; James Ballard to M. French, June 7, 1830, FFP; S. L. Matthews to M. French, June 16, 1830, FFP; John Kendrick to M. French, August 16, 1831, FFP; M. French to Austa Winchell, October 5, 1831, FFP.

we also look back to French's sale of his magazine in 1864 and how that decision shaped his return to private life. Chapter five traces the evolution of how French was remembered (and forgotten) after his death, followed by an analytical summary of the external conditions and personal qualities that made possible (and later limited) French's influential, multivocational career. That chapter concludes with a proposal of the steps necessary to build on this study toward a theory of multivocational ministry that might be applied to ministerial formation.

In 1852 Mansfield French exclaimed to his wife, "O to be holy, to be useful, to go down to the grave like a shock of corn. Let me die the death of the righteous."⁹ The end that he sought required a beginning, to which we now turn.

⁹ M. French to A. French, December 21, 1852, FFP.

CHAPTER ONE

EVANGELICAL EPISCOPALIAN EDUCATOR (1810-43)

Remember that to your care now is committed the young and immortal mind. The object of a teacher should be twofold—to improve the understanding and mend the heart.

—James Ballard to Mansfield French (1829)

Heritage: Religion, Land, and Culture

Three themes mark the story of Mansfield French's paternal ancestry: colonial Connecticut Anglicanism, land dealing, and the intertwining of each with the culture of early western Vermont.

The Rev. Jeremiah French (1641-85), Mansfield's paternal ancestor of six generations prior, was the scion of English gentry in Suffolk descended from the Normans. He attended Caius College at Cambridge and was ordained a minister of the Church of England. Jeremiah preached boldly against the deposition of Charles I and spent most of the rest of his life enduring and evading persecution from Parliamentary and Cromwellian forces.¹ Jeremiah's staunch Episcopalianism and Royalism against Puritan powers set the tone for generations of his descendants, including his grandson Samuel French II (1687-1763).

Samuel was known as "the Joiner," a master carpenter who probably moved with his wife and first child, Samuel III, to the American colonies in 1714. Samuel II may have worked in construction through the commercial enterprises of cousins in New York

¹ Mansfield Joseph French, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1940), 14-22.

City and East Jersey, but the first unambiguous record of his activity in America shows that he settled with his family in Stratford, Connecticut in 1722. Samuel bore witness to his proud Anglican heritage in the midst of Puritan New England when he coincidentally arrived in Stratford the same year that the first Anglican minister was settled there and the parish's church building was about to be built. Samuel aided the construction with his expertise and labor and also became a vestryman of the church. The fact that Samuel was known as a joiner instead of a gentleman suggests that the family had fallen on hard times; perhaps persecution during the Commonwealth had taken a toll that the family never recovered from, and this may have eventuated in Samuel's emigration years after the Restoration. Nevertheless, Samuel II found a path to prominence in his new colonial locale. A relative named Jonathan Pitman was one of the proprietors of Stratford and deeded Samuel all of his Stratford property. Samuel busily bought and sold property in Stratford and deeded allotments to his sons. The family eventually relocated to Ripton Parish, which became Huntington Center, Connecticut.²

Samuel II's second son, Jeremiah French,³ moved from Connecticut to Dutchess County, New York and there joined the group of proprietors who surveyed and founded Manchester, Vermont in 1764 under the auspices of the Province of New Hampshire (though sovereignty over the territory was contested by New York at the time). Jeremiah owned seven of the seventy rights to land in the town reserved to individuals, and he

² French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 38-45.

³ Jeremiah and Samuel were the two most common male names among 17th- and 18th-century Frenches. The Rev. Jeremiah French begot a Jeremiah and a Samuel (I). Samuel I fathered a Jeremiah and a Samuel (II). Samuel II fathered a Samuel (III) and the Jeremiah who was one of the proprietors of Manchester, Vermont. That Jeremiah had a son also named Jeremiah just as his brother Samuel III begot a new Samuel (IV). See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 33, 46, 51-52.

persuaded his older brother Samuel III (1710-88) and younger brother Thomas to bring their families and join him in Manchester; they arrived in about 1773. Jeremiah French was one of the rustic town's fathers. Few proprietors in Vermont towns settled on their lands, preferring to sell them at a profit to pioneers. However, P. Jeffrey Potash's study of the towns of Cornwall, Shoreham, and Middlebury further north found that the few proprietors of those towns who did settle there quickly became an elite that strongly influenced the course of those communities. The French brothers fit that description for Manchester. Jeremiah served for years as town clerk, Thomas was one of those charged with ascertaining town boundaries, and Samuel III served as surveyor both of the town and of the county as well as filling other roles before relocating to the neighboring town of Dorset.⁴

The French family's local prominence continued to the next generation as Samuel IV (1739-1809) followed his father Samuel III as town surveyor, but the family's position was complicated by the American Revolution. Like many Connecticut Anglicans,⁵ a number of members of the French clan openly espoused the Loyalist cause during the Revolution. Samuel IV's two brothers and other relatives fought for Loyalist regiments and lost their lands in Manchester to Patriot confiscation during the conflict. By contrast, Samuel IV and his father, Samuel III, remained officially neutral, staying on their lands and preventing their confiscation. Their reasons are a matter of speculation. One

⁴ Edwin L. Bigelow and Nancy H. Otis, *Manchester, Vermont: A Pleasant Land among the Mountains* (Manchester, VT, The Town of Manchester: 1961), 4-6, 10, 274; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 47-48; P. Jeffrey Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District: Patterns of Community Development and Religious Activity, 1761-1850*, Chicago Studies in the History of American Religion, vol. 16, Jerald C. Brauer and Martin E. Marty, eds. (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1991), 29-31.

⁵ Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 8.

possibility is that their neutrality was sincere, and thus their only concern in the tumult was holding onto their real property. A second is that they secretly were Loyalists like their kin, but their concerns for their property and for their dependents' welfare prevailed over their zeal to uphold the king's sovereignty. A third possibility is that they sympathized with the Patriot cause but could not bear to take up arms against their Loyalist family members whom they might face in battle. Whatever their motive, under the Treaty of Paris, lands belonging to members of the Church of England were secure from confiscation after the war, so Samuel IV managed to see his real estate through the chaos into the republic with his properties still firmly in his hands.⁶

The Frenches' denominational credentials were well-established not only because of their ancestry and involvement with the church in Connecticut but also because they were among the initiators of Anglican worship in Manchester from its early settlement. Worship services began in the 1760s with sporadic visits by missionaries from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and by settled clergy from Massachusetts. In those early days

[s]ome fifteen or twenty families held services in the courtroom of the building then serving as a Court House in the Village, in homes, or in schoolhouses. . . . The first organization was October 4, 1782 under the Rev. Bostwick, when twenty-four Manchester Episcopalians formed a parish of the Church of England.⁷

Nevertheless, it would be some time before regular Episcopalian worship would be conducted and a minister settled. The first thirty years of Manchester's history (1764-94) were marked by religious apathy and difficulty for religious institutions to take

⁶ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 51-53.

⁷ Bigelow and Otis, *Manchester, Vermont*, 48-49.

root. In this respect Manchester was typical of Vermont frontier towns of this era. Various explanations have been proffered for this standard irreligious phase.⁸ One has to do with the unusual variety of religious sects that Vermont attracted. Vermont was settled by New Englanders (or “Yankees”) of all kinds who saw in the virgin lands overshadowed by the Green Mountains a chance to better their situation in life. All had a financial interest, but some had the additional motivation of being misfits in their colonies of origin. Vermont was a place where people who chafed against the New England Congregationalist Standing Order could escape the marginalization that their heterodox beliefs forced upon them. Intensifying this phenomenon, the settlers who followed the Frenches arrived in the midst and the aftermath of the Revolution. As David M. Ludlum notes,

The American Revolution . . . was a social upheaval of great consequence. . . . In the back country of New England this tendency was illustrated by a concerted reaction against the politico-ecclesiastical domination long wielded by the Standing Order clergy. . . . Among the non-conformists in New England were Separates, Baptists, Quakers, Episcopalians, and a sprinkling of anti-Calvinist Arminians in all denominations. Practically every village in the Green Mountains contained a representative cross section of these faiths.⁹

In towns this diverse, it took some time for any sect to grow large enough to construct a building and settle a minister. (In Manchester the Baptists reached this threshold first.)

As misfit Yankees, the Anglican Frenches must have been refreshed by the liberty that Vermont gave them to be secure in the mainstream of their new town; that liberty may have been part of what drew them north. But by the same token, Manchester, like the Vermont frontier generally, was a wild place. Again Ludlum:

⁸ See, e.g., Bigelow and Otis, *Manchester, Vermont*, 26-28.

⁹ David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 7-8.

It is significant that Vermont was passing through the frontier stage of settlement at the very time that a new government and a new social order were arising in America. A remarkably vigorous and unmannered society came into being which showed little respect for traditional ties and institutions. Free for the moment of the controls of religion and the civil state, a postwar generation in Vermont indulged in a period of loose living and freethinking almost unparalleled in American history.¹⁰

This was especially true of the area the Frenches had settled in. Vermont is bisected lengthwise by the Green Mountains, and two distinct cultures developed among the settlers on each side of the range. Settlers in the Connecticut River valley in eastern Vermont tended eventually to replicate the Yankee culture from whence they had come, including its institutions such as the Congregationalist church. By contrast, settlers on the western slope like the citizens of Manchester, hedged on the east by the Green Mountains and on the west by the Taconic Range in the south and Lake Champlain in the north, were more likely to be rebels against New England's order. This area was the home of radical democrat and Deist Ethan Allen, the last refuge of insurrectionist Daniel Shays, and a hotbed of all the heresy, Jacobinism, and libertinism that alarmed pious New England Federalists. After 1800 it was powerfully affected by waves of evangelical revival that swept away radical rationalism in favor of an emotive response to the Christian gospel and zealous crusades for social reform. As late as 1847 a traveler characterized eastern Vermonters as typical New Englanders with "the same puritanical gravity, that shrewdness . . . which enables them to drive a lucrative business in the humblest and most unpromising pursuits . . . full of enterprise and industry," apparently stingy yet "honest in dealing and punctual to a fault." By contrast, the traveler viewed western

¹⁰ Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 3.

Vermonters as “easy” and “careless” like “the people of the Middle States . . . more luxurious and more given to speculation . . . generous, careless of expense . . . more intelligent and refined, while they are less public spirited than their trans-alpine neighbors.” At the same time, however, they possessed a disturbing tendency toward social inequity as certain ascendant families gained a stranglehold on good land.¹¹

It was in the environment of postrevolutionary Vermont that Samuel French IV’s son Joshua (1767-1857) came of age. In the western towns that Potash studied, civic and economic influence in the 1790s was heavily concentrated in the hands of the men who had been there the longest, had the largest landholdings, and were most active in local land speculation as a means to profit. These men exerted themselves to benefit the common good by the improvements and institutions they created in hopes of luring more immigrants, which would enrich their own landholdings as well as the entire town.¹² This characterization of local western Vermont elites seems also to fit Manchester and Joshua French. Joshua followed in his forebears’ footsteps by making his chief occupation the purchase and sale of land, attaining among other property a 200-acre farm that included prime land just north of Manchester Village that extended westward up Equinox Mountain. In addition to real estate and farming Joshua also operated a distillery; according to his granddaughter Eliza (French) Taylor (whose testimony admittedly is often unreliable), Joshua owned a general store and had a stake in a nearby marble quarry as well. As for prominence in society, Joshua was Worshipful Master of the local Masons’

¹¹ John Orvis, “Letter from Vermont, Ferrisburgh, Vt., June 14, 1847,” *The Harbinger* (New York and Boston), July 3, 1847, cited in Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 13-16.

¹² Potash, *Vermont’s Burned-Over District*, 56-58.

Lodge. In civic affairs he continued his father's and grandfather's role as surveyor in Manchester, took a turn as clerk like his great-uncle Jeremiah, supervised the construction of a highway from Manchester over Equinox Mountain to Sandgate to the west, and served as Justice of the Peace.¹³

However, it is possible that Joshua's public stature, though not his wealth, diminished after 1800, when he stepped down from his last civic office. Potash found that in Shoreham and Cornwall, which were small farming towns, scions of large landholders cemented their status as town leaders in the early nineteenth century, but in more industrial and commercial Middlebury those leaders gave way to merchants, manufacturers, and lawyers. Manchester may have been going the way of Middlebury, which partly explains Joshua's retreat from civic responsibility.¹⁴ Yet as Joshua turned from public affairs he devoted himself to the consolidation of Manchester's fledgling Episcopal parish, which took the name Zion. Though Joshua never became a communicant of Zion Episcopal Parish, he did serve as a vestryman and oversaw and contributed to the construction of its building in 1822.¹⁵

When Joshua French's fourth child, Mansfield, was born to his wife Grace

¹³ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 57-58; "Extracts from 'Reminiscences of Eliza Minerva French Taylor,'" Genealogical Notebook No. 3, 71, French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY; Bigelow and Otis, *Manchester, Vermont*, 10, 21.

¹⁴ Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 121-22.

¹⁵ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 58.

(Bassett) French on February 21, 1810,¹⁶ the boy received a tripartite inheritance that would enable and shape much of his life to come. The French endowment was, first, a loyal and ancient commitment to Episcopalianism; second, the cultural heritage of New England, but in the liberal vein of western Vermont, not quite like other Yankees; and third, a substantial cache of wealth grown by generations of savvy land-dealing.

Upbringing: Evangelicalism, Episcopalianism, and Education

Soon after the natural wilderness of Vermont drew and challenged southern New Englanders, the moral, religious, and social wilderness those pioneers made drew and challenged zealous Congregationalists.

The evangelical children and grandchildren of New Englanders who experienced the Great Awakening in the 1740s found themselves gravely threatened by the American Revolution, which they had largely supported, and its formative aftermath. For complex reasons, the violent chaos of America's break with England severely disrupted churchly structures and habits for a time. Additionally, however, the Revolution united a diversity of starkly contrasting regional cultures, some of which contained considerable diversity within themselves, and nationhood required new structures to support united pluralism.

¹⁶ In his boyhood French was apparently known alternatively among family members as Mansfield Joshua French; one bit of documentary evidence comes in a letter from his relative E. Hard addressed to "M. J. French." Yet officially in youth and throughout his adulthood French was only known by the given name Mansfield. French would later name his second son Mansfield Joshua. See E. Hard to M. French, Nov. 25, 1829, FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 72-73.

Little is known about Grace Bassett. She was from Newtown, Connecticut and married Joshua French in about 1791. Genealogical records indicate that her paternal ancestor who immigrated to New England, Thomas Bassett, first settled in Dorchester, Massachusetts during the Great Puritan Migration of the early seventeenth century. Grace may have been a standard-issue New England Congregationalist, but there is no knowledge of how she impacted the religious formation of Mansfield and his siblings, who were raised in the Protestant Episcopal Church. See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 57; David Shelton, "David Shelton's Ancestors and Related Families," RootsWeb, http://worldconnect.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=david_shelton&id=17210 (accessed November 20, 2013).

By its very nature, pluralism threatened the old Puritan notion of a covenanted people and the mutually supporting structures of church and state that kept a homogeneous community conformed to God's laws and purposes. To make matters worse for Yankees who kept that vision alive, the Revolution both provided the space and stoked the fires of an array of religious, philosophical, and lifestyle persuasions that diverged sharply from Puritan-evangelical righteousness. The movement toward religious disestablishment gathered steam, giving new hope to New England's Episcopalians, Baptists, Quakers, and neophyte Methodists. Even more ominously, the late eighteenth century witnessed the ascendancy of skeptical rationalism or "freethinking" that took hold among cultural elites and some common people in various forms. This intellectual current had converted numerous Congregationalist churches to a liberal and moralistic form of Arminianism that had begun sprouting what would become Unitarianism and Universalism. Some Americans went even further to non-religious Deism and even atheism. The number of the stridently non-religious may actually have been quite small, but they posed themselves as the way of the future.¹⁷

Evangelicals were on their heels, and they took the threats of pluralism and skeptical rationalism very seriously. Nowhere was the danger more severe than in Vermont, which Yankee evangelicals viewed as a haven for freethinking and whose nearness made its infidelity all the more odious. In addition to its freewheeling pluralism and heretical ways, the sins of drunkenness, gambling, and prostitution were

¹⁷ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 364-65, 374, 379-82; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), NOOK e-book, 838-48; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 128-35, 159-70.

commonplace in the overall looseness of the frontier environment. The paucity of organized churches were both a cause and symptom of the state's moral problem. So Calvinist Congregationalists counterattacked, sending a cadre of missionaries into the Green Mountain State in the 1790s. The strategy worked: once new congregations took root, waves of religious revival and spiritual fervor washed over Vermont, eclipsed the allure of rationalism, and stigmatized frontier immorality—the Second Great Awakening had begun. The Calvinists' only frustration was that their evangelical Arminian opponents were buoyed by the same revival tide that deluged the rationalists. The awakening began in 1801 and slumbered again during the insecurity and intense political infighting of the War of 1812, but a new burst of revivals in 1816-17 kicked off a religious escalation that continued without interruption until the Panic of 1837. Amid growing amity between Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals, conversions and swelling churches generated new missions and social benevolence organizations. Virtually every community in the state was touched.¹⁸

Congregationalism was not the only denomination in America trying to adjust to a postrevolutionary world: the Church of England in America faced serious threats to its existence. The church bore a loathsome Tory image to many, and its episcopal structure was out of sync with democracy and equality. In addition, once disestablished the church needed to compete with other sects for adherents and resources for the first time. Finally, eighteenth-century Anglicanism had been deeply affected by rationalism, especially

¹⁸ Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 25-55. Potash (*Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 182-83) found evidence in northwestern Vermont to substantiate Whitney Cross's thesis that the revivals of the Second Great Awakening broke out in communities that had passed through the initial pioneer phase to reach "agrarian maturity," which was marked by stable and structured organization of agricultural commercialization.

among elites. While this may have tempered the denomination's unpopularity shortly after the Revolution when rationalism was on the rise, changing tastes at the turn of the century made Anglicanism's deistic and moralistic bent a major liability. The Second Great Awakening made the church appear out of touch and even tainted by the extremes taken by rationalistic French revolutionaries.

Thus rationalism in the Protestant Episcopal Church receded rapidly before two rising movements—High Church and Evangelicalism—that competed to direct the church to cope and thrive in nineteenth-century America. High Churchmen held that the unique forms of Episcopal devotion and liturgy were all-important because they gradually fit those who performed them for heaven. By contrast, Evangelicals vigorously attacked “formalism,” asserting that not only were forms useless by themselves, but in fact they were even offensive to God and a stumbling block to the unsaved without the material of a regenerate, converted heart through which the believer in Christ was instantaneously acquitted of sin and qualified for eternal life. Nevertheless, Evangelicals did love Episcopalian forms so long as the spiritual condition of the worshipers genuinely aligned with the devotional words of the liturgy. High Churchmen, jealous for the unique saving power of Episcopalian forms, stood aloof from or even antagonistic toward other denominations. Evangelical Episcopalians on the other hand sought warm relations with evangelicals in other denominations, although they were also sensitive to maintain their belief in the superiority of the Episcopalian way, which complicated those relations. This moderating stance frequently made Evangelicals suspect to High Churchmen on the one side and to non-Episcopalians on the other. At its high tide in the mid-nineteenth century

the Evangelical party had a small numerical edge over the High Church party in the Protestant Episcopal Church before both retreated before the rise of liberalism toward the end of the century.¹⁹

During Mansfield French's boyhood, when revival fires blazed through Vermont, was Manchester's Zion Episcopal Parish "High Church" or "Evangelical"? The evidence suggests a complex answer.

On the one hand, the Connecticut Anglicans who first settled Manchester and founded the Episcopal parish, including the Frenches, probably did not look kindly on contemporary evangelicalism. In the Great Awakening of their parents' generation or their own youth, revivalism was embraced by Anglican laity in the colonies where the church was predominant while it was shunned where the church was a minority. Connecticut Anglicans, besieged by a Congregationalist majority, were particularly noteworthy for their antirevival stance during the Awakening as well as for their later Loyalism—which was displayed by the French family—and their comfort with a monarchical bishop. During the Second Great Awakening the Protestant Episcopal Church served at times as a refuge for Vermonters uncomfortable with evangelical revivals and their effects. When an Episcopal congregation was established in Middlebury, Vermont in 1810, it was heavily composed of wealthy merchants, industrialists, and professionals with a distaste for the revival that was going on in their community. When the Diocese of Vermont was created in 1832, its first bishop, John Henry Hopkins, was a leading High Churchman opposed to

¹⁹ Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 7-18, 32-34. Following Butler I use "Evangelical" to refer to an adherent of a faction in the Protestant Episcopal Church and "evangelical" for things pertaining to the broader, transdenominational movement.

evangelicalism and especially the novel revivalistic techniques associated with Presbyterian Charles Grandison Finney dubbed the “new measures.”²⁰ French’s friends from Zion at times characterized their parish as one that any Evangelical would despair over. “From a letter received from the north lately,” wrote a friend residing in Virginia,

I learn there is a universal turning to God in many towns but alas our native town remains unbenefitted, and in the same state of apathy for which it was always remarkable. I fear, Dear Sir, there are too many formalists there. The people seem to think if they attend church and conference meetings, and keep from the gross violation of God’s law, that they are doing well enough. Alas, how miserably they will be mistaken on that day when we shall discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God & him that serveth him not.²¹

This portrayal of Zion, however, must be balanced by the simple observation that one Evangelical from the parish wrote it to another. In fact there were a number of Evangelicals associated with Zion in the early nineteenth century. It begins with Zion’s first settled pastor, Abraham Bronson. Bronson was the minister of the first Episcopal parish in Vermont, St. James in Arlington, when he began traveling to Manchester to conduct worship on alternating Sundays in 1802. Over twenty years later Bronson relocated to Manchester as Zion’s resident priest in 1825, serving until 1833. Though little is known about Bronson, he eventually began to conduct four-days’ (also known as “protracted”) meetings designed to produce conversions. This “new measure” was a bit forward even for Evangelical Episcopalians.²² Perhaps Bronson’s Evangelical sentiments

²⁰ Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 6, 8, 19 n. 21; Potash, *Vermont’s Burned-Over District*, 152-55, 167-71.

²¹ Theodore S. Swift to M. French, June 16, 1831, FFP.

²² Bigelow and Otis, *Manchester, Vermont*, 49-51; Joshua French to M. French, Mar. 11, 1832, FFP. Diana Hochstedt Butler explains that though strongly prorevival, Evangelicals distanced themselves from some “Finneyite” devices, preferring prayer meetings, preaching, the Episcopal liturgy, Lenten practices, Bible classes, Sunday schools, and inquiry meetings, all accommodated to revivalistic purposes. Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 34-37.

may also be gleaned from the text he preached on November 25, 1829: “O Lord revive thy work” (Habakkuk 3:2).²³

Another Evangelical clergyman associated with Zion Parish is John Henry Hopkins’ predecessor, Alexander Viets Griswold, Bishop of the Eastern Diocese, which encompassed all of New England except Connecticut before the Diocese of Vermont was created out of it in 1832. On one visit to Manchester he preached on Acts 26:28 (“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”) to the admiration of one of French’s cousins.²⁴

French had a number of friends of his own generation who reveal their Evangelical ardor in their correspondence with him. Foremost among them in prominence and probably also in intimacy with French in young adulthood was Heman Dyer. Dyer was a sickly, bright, serious, diligent, and intense young man. Virtually every letter he wrote to French included a sober exhortation to prioritize eternity over worldly interests and earthly suffering. The first extant letter sent to French from Dyer is typical:

The temporal prospects of the church [in Arlington, Vt.] are promising and the spiritual ones are perhaps more favorable than they ever have been although we have great reason to mourn over the coldness that prevails our land and the little attention that is paid to the concerns of an eternal world, yet I think that our members are awaking from sleep and feel a deeper interest in these things than they ever have. Yet I feel that we cannot arrive to any state of perfection in this life where we may remain secure and contented as it is our duty as pilgrims and travellers to press forward with all our strength towards the kingdom of heaven, forgetting the things that are behind counting the world with pleasures as nothing that we may win Christ. But one thing I would wish and urge upon those of us who are preparing for the ministry, that is, that we might ever keep the latter end in view, to consider the importance of the station and the awful consequences which depend upon our life and conduct.

²³ E. Hard to M. French, Nov. 25, 1829, FFP.

²⁴ Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 11, 17 n. 11; E. Hard to M. French, Nov. 25, 1829, FFP.

Let us consider that eternal blessedness or eternal misery will be the end of all our labors, that many souls through the instrumentality of our labours may be exalted to heaven or thrust down to hell.

Let us study with a single eye to the glory of God that they may be seasoned by his grace, for what will it profit us if we should gain all the knowledge of this world unless we have the spirit of truth to lead us into the way of all truth, that we may spend our talents in his service here and at last be permitted to spend an eternity in his presence? One thing is certain, that all our best acquirements and all our graces without the grace of God will be but as a sounding brass and a tinkling symbol.²⁵

A synthesis of these testimonies to Zion Episcopal Parish and Vermont

Episcopalianism in general suggests a parish whose roots, core families, and much of the laity were antievangelical, moralistic, and formalistic. Nevertheless the church was under Evangelical clerical leadership while Congregationalist-instigated revivals were cropping up all over Vermont. Some of the rising generation were caught up in the awakening as it blossomed in other denominations and thence committed themselves to the Episcopal Church, perhaps garnering an ambivalent reaction from their parents. From 1810 to 1829, Vermont churches of several denominations grew and were expected to grow through conversions harvested during revivals, especially among the thirteen- to twenty-year-old children of church members. Despite the predominance of females among converts, revivals were almost the only times that males became connected to churches. The Evangelical contingent in Manchester's Zion Parish saw new communicants received into

²⁵ Heman Dyer to M. French, Oct. 3, 1827, FFP. This happens to be the first extant letter that French received from anyone. Dyer would later influence French to follow him westward to study at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. After a few years of more or less simultaneously studying in the college himself, teaching younger boys, and launching frontier Sunday schools, Dyer was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church and served as chancellor of the Western University of Pennsylvania (today the University of Pittsburgh), then as secretary and general manager of the Evangelical Knowledge Society, and then as editor of the *Episcopal Quarterly Review*, a banner periodical of Evangelical Episcopalianism. See Heman Dyer, *Records of an Active Life*, 4th ed. (New York: Thomas Whitaker, 1886]) cf. Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 17 n. 11.

the church as a result of revived attention to religion and hoped “that the present handful may be but the beginning of an abundant harvest.”²⁶

For several years they were usually disappointed. Nevertheless, on August 13, 1826, Mansfield French, the sixteen-year-old son of a proud Episcopalian family, became a communicant at Zion nearly thirteen years after being baptized at the age of three. Earlier that year French experienced an evangelical conversion at revival meetings at the academy that he attended in Bennington, Vermont.²⁷ For Evangelical Episcopalians like Abraham Bronson and Alexander Viets Griswold,

“The single paramount, indispensable qualification . . . for [confirmation], is a *converted heart*.” . . . Evangelicals did not believe that all baptized persons were already Christians, so confirmation, therefore, added no grace to salvation. To the Evangelicals, one must already be converted before being confirmed. Confirmation was a public sign and profession of the internal work of grace. For them, it functioned much as adult baptism did for Baptists. . . . The rite, therefore, served as an evangelistic tool for those who had been baptized but had not yet experienced grace. Evangelical bishops . . . frequently warned clergy that no Episcopalian should be confirmed who could not testify to an *experience* of grace. Only such an experience admitted one into the full privileges of the Christian life and the Episcopal Church.²⁸

Though it is unknown how rigorously Bronson taught and required this standard

²⁶ Potash, *Vermont's Burned-Over District*, 183-84; E. Hard to M. French, Nov. 25, 1829, FFP.

²⁷ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 73; Eliza French Taylor, “Biography of Rev. Mansfield French,” 3F21-020-023, FFP; George Lansing Taylor, “Biography of Rev. Mansfield French,” 3F21-001-002, FFP. French’s denominational surroundings at Bennington are uncertain. His daughter Eliza later recalled that he was converted in meetings in a Congregationalist church while he studied at Bennington, and James Ballard, who took over the principalship of the school in about 1829, was a Congregationalist. Yet during French’s lifetime his wife Austa claimed that he was converted in the academy through “contact with Baptists.” See *Memorial of the Rev. James Ballard, 1805-1881* (Grand Rapids, MI: n.p., 1881), 22; “The Christian’s Privilege,” *Beauty of Holiness* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 98.

For a theological/religious examination of the process of conversion among youth in evangelical Congregationalist settings in this era, see pp. 43-48 below; for a psychosocial description see Donald M. Scott, “Abolition as a Sacred Vocation,” in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 53-60.

²⁸ Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 42-43, quoting Stephen Tyng, Sr., *Guide to Confirmation* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1833), 35, all italics original.

for confirmation, we do know that from his own confirmation Mansfield took his faith very seriously. In Heman Dyer's letter quoted above, written one year later, Dyer referred to himself and French as "those of us who are preparing for the ministry."²⁹ Thus soon after Mansfield French was converted he also sensed God's call to ordained ministry, and he immediately began to respond. In this he was not unusual among young men converted through evangelical revivals in that era. Cataclysmic, immediate conversion rapidly yielded cataclysmic, immediate vocation in many cases. In historian Donald M. Scott's words, "They saw their whole lives as changed, feeling that they had to drop what they were doing or had planned to do and dedicate themselves fully to God's service . . . they felt that this life of active consecration and service had begun *now*." In young French's case it meant dedicating himself to missionary service in Greece. French's intended destination is intriguing; Greece had been fighting a war for independence against the Ottoman Empire since 1821, which fired the romantic imaginations of European and American liberals. This son of progressive Vermont felt called to get in on the revolutionary action as a preacher of the gospel to the oppressed who struggled for freedom.³⁰

Mansfield may have been the first in his family line to experience regeneration as evangelicals described it, but more likely his father Joshua had gone first. Judging by the tardiness with which Joshua engaged in evangelical piety, the spiritual condition of his

²⁹ This reference is corroborated in other letters. See e.g. Heman Dyer to M. French, Mar. 18, 1828, FFP. Moreover, in 1828 French was appointed by Zion as a delegate to the Protestant Episcopal Church's state convention. See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 73.

³⁰ Scott, "Abolition," 60; "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 14, no. 4: 98.

older children,³¹ and his never becoming a communicant, it seems probable that Joshua's conversion had come relatively late in life, though not too late to encourage Mansfield's faith and support his zeal. Beginning even before Mansfield's conversion, Joshua freely sank his wealth into his youngest child's education to prepare him for the great work of saving souls, praying that God would "enable you to fill that station which I always had a desire you should . . . and that you may be found faithful and instrumental in doing much good and converting many souls to God."³² Mansfield's position in the birth order may also have disposed him to this career: with Joshua's oldest son Hiram equipped to take over the farm and the businesses, Joshua was free to prepare Mansfield for a different occupation.

Mansfield's practical education had begun early, helping his father to run the distillery and the land Joshua farmed himself, assisting his father surveying land, and possibly gleaning knowledge from Joshua's law books. His scholastic education probably began early as well, most likely in a district common school at perhaps as young as three years old. When Mansfield grew older his father paid to send him to a series of nearby academies: a school run by a man named Buel in Manchester from 1823 to 1825, a seminary in Bennington, Vermont in 1826, an academy in Castleton, Vermont in 1827-28, and back to Bennington again. This was a major investment for Joshua; according to Margaret A. Nash, "one estimate is that even by 1850 only a small minority—about six percent—of the population ever attended, let alone graduated from, an academy. A family

³¹ See p. 72.

³² Joshua French to M. French, Jan. 5, 1830, FFP.

had to be wealthy enough to pay tuition as well as to forego a child's earnings during the years he or she might otherwise be employed." The French family's financial eminence made Mansfield's education and future possible; poverty or middling circumstances foreclosed the same for many others.³³

At this point an explanatory excursus on antebellum higher education is in order, because French's experience in it as a student, teacher, proprietor, and fundraiser dominated such a large portion of his life.

As Nash describes, in the antebellum era, the terms "college," "academy," "seminary" (except for "theological seminary"), "high school," and so on were almost synonymous. All these institutions offered education beyond the rudiments; all of them taught students mostly between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five though they might accommodate pupils as young as ten and as old as forty. "Academies" (a common catch-all descriptor for all these institutions except colleges) were more likely to include practical subjects such as surveying and navigation in their curricula than colleges were, but this was not a firm rule either for academies or for colleges. The curricula of many academies were pitched at the same level as a college education. There were many more academies than colleges, which made them more likely than colleges to be attended as the highest level of education, and they equipped students for a broad range of adult occupations. However, in one respect colleges were clearly distinguished from academies: they granted degrees that qualified graduates for the professions of the ministry, law, and medicine. As these professions were closed to women, colleges were

³³ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 73-74; Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 41.

male institutions, though they were not superior in academic rigor to the best “female seminaries” and “collegiate institutes” that young women attended. Academies themselves could be male-only, female-only, or coeducational. For men bound for a career in a profession, an academy served as a nebulous preparation for college—while some might forego an academy altogether and go directly to four or more years at a college, others might study long enough in a local academy to shorten their college education. Around 1830 this blurry picture gradually shifted as American colleges and universities (including a few female and coeducational ones) proliferated and broadened their appeal, professional education moved out of colleges and into professional graduate schools such as theological seminaries, and academies began taking on the character of preparatory schools.³⁴

Students like French at every academy learned English first and foremost, which incorporated the sub-disciplines of reading (including reading out loud), writing, spelling (oral), orthography (written spelling), handwriting, grammar, composition, belles-lettres, rhetoric, and oratory. Reading, writing, and spelling were not considered purely rudimentary until after 1840 once common schools had widely improved. Arithmetic was standard, especially for commercial applications. In the nineteenth century academies taught natural philosophy (chemistry and physics), natural history (zoology, botany, and geology), and courses in ancient, modern, and American history; in the postrevolutionary generation all these subjects were subsumed under the rubric “geography,” a label that still occasionally connoted diverse subject matter in the antebellum period. Some

³⁴ Nash, *Women's Education*, 5-7, 37, 40-41.

academies offered modern languages (especially French and Italian) and ancient languages (Latin and Greek). Female students might be taught needlework as an occupational skill, though it diminished in frequency after 1830, and males might be taught navigation and surveying. Students in some female academies studied vocal and/or instrumental music, drawing, painting, lacework, and waxwork. The courses that were offered had everything to do not only with what students wanted but what the teachers, often a single schoolmaster/-mistress or a couple, knew how to teach.³⁵

Academies not only proposed to furnish the intellect but to train moral sense and action.

Schools attended to moral education in various ways. At virtually all seminaries, academies, and colleges, trustees required presence at church services for male and female students. In the curricula, courses in moral philosophy taught students to “reconcile . . . reason and natural law with . . . theology and Christian law.” In most colleges for men, moral philosophy was a capstone course for seniors, usually taught by the college president. Similarly, schools for young women invariably listed either moral philosophy or moral reasoning as courses for upper-level students.³⁶

This was all the more the case for schools supported by evangelicals, especially those from the culturally (and in some cases politically) established churches of the East, who saw education as a crucial component of their mission of revival and reform.³⁷

The philosophical basis for postrevolutionary and antebellum moral instruction, Scottish Common Sense Realism, shaped the conventional reasoning of at least three

³⁵ Nash, *Women's Education*, 42-49.

³⁶ Nash, *Women's Education*, 56. See also William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press and William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 18-19, 60-63.

³⁷ See pp. 56-64.

generations of mainstream American cultural leaders, including Mansfield French.

Common Sense Realism was a genuine offshoot of the Enlightenment—it exalted reason, scorned “superstition,” eschewed recourse to tradition as an authority in its own right, prized empirical observation along the lines of Isaac Newton and John Locke, aimed at inculcating genuine virtue, and was generally optimistic about humans’ chances of success in these endeavors if they applied themselves. What made Common Sense Realism distinct from other Enlightenment philosophies was its assertion that intuitions commonly found among all human beings could reasonably be assumed to be true; for example, if all humans operate on the assumption that the external world that they perceive is real, then it actually is real. When Common Sense Realism was applied to ethics, it likewise assumed the existence of universal, reliable moral intuitions. It also fostered a high degree of confidence in a person’s ability to be self-aware, to reason to moral conclusions, to communicate one’s reasoning without misinterpretation, and to interpret accurately the reasoning of others.

Common Sense Realism allowed Americans to embrace the spirit of the age and use it to justify their progressive experiment with liberty. Yet at the same time, its dismissal of extreme rationalistic skepticism and its appeal to the conventional wisdom of mankind allowed Americans to modernize with minimal anarchy and the maximum latitude to retain the elements of traditional Western civilization that they preferred, including Protestant Christianity. It helped evangelicals to use modern intellectual methods to justify ancient beliefs and traditional practices, to champion both religion and natural science, and to marry traditional Christian faith with America’s version of modern

liberalism. It also described a world in which moral issues were simple and comprehensible and where acting on moral knowledge was well within an individual's power, which made failure to do right all the more wicked and inexcusable. This philosophy had earth-shattering repercussions when Mansfield French and his contemporaries were mature adults.³⁸

Of course, in addition to the intellectual moral training of Common Sense Realism, French was also taught the religion of the heart and was urged to abandon selfish sin and accept Christ by means of God-initiated regenerating grace. He learned both these lessons at the seminary in Bennington, and at the age of nineteen he began to teach them to others.

Revival at the Heath Select School

In the small town of Heath in western Massachusetts, Congregationalist minister Moses Miller devoted much of his thirty-six-year pastorate (1804-40) to local education. In addition to his labors to improve the town's common schools, a fruitful spiritual harvest fueled a new initiative. One wave of the Second Great Awakening broke in Heath in 1822-23, and 121 professing believers were added to the church. In Miller's own words, "More than one-third of the population of the town, and a majority of the adults, were professors of religion. . . . We were considered at that period as rather a model

³⁸ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 174-80; Mark Noll, "Introduction: Christian Colleges, Christian Worldviews, and an Invitation to Research," in Ringenberg, *Christian College*, 10-14, 19-20; *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), NOOK e-book, 28-29.

community.”³⁹ Under Miller’s leadership, the energy from this revival immediately poured into a new endeavor, the formation of coeducational “select schools”⁴⁰ for the secondary-level education of young people from Heath and the wider region. Miller and interested laymen employed a well-educated teacher each autumn to teach a fall term and if practicable a winter/spring term as well.

Mansfield French came to serve as the schoolmaster at Heath for a spring term in 1829 despite not teaching there the previous fall; he reprised this role in the fall of 1829 and the spring of 1830.⁴¹ French was driven to teach school by disappointment: eye trouble prevented him from reading enough to advance in his own studies on the way to ordination as a foreign missionary. Teaching was a fallback, but whatever perplexity his poor vision may have caused him as to the calling on his life, he gave his first job everything he had.⁴²

French’s match with the Heath Select School involved a recommendation by James Ballard, who had taught at Heath for two years before becoming the principal of the Bennington school at the end of French’s time there. As French got started in his new position, Ballard advised his successor,

³⁹ Miller quoted in C. E. Dickinson, “The Development and Influence of New England Ideas,” in Edward P. Guild, ed. *Centennial Anniversary of the Town of Heath, Mass., August 19, 1885: Addresses, Speeches, Letters, Statistics, Etc., Etc.* (Boston: Advertiser Publishing Co., 1885), 87-88. It is interesting to note that despite Second Great Awakening’s wide impact and great power to gain attention, what Miller’s contemporaries considered to be a “model” of success in a community came well short of complete conversion.

⁴⁰ “Select schools” is plural, because each schoolmaster was considered to run his own “school,” perhaps repeatedly, for set intervals. Thus “select school” referred not only to the institution itself but also to each academic year.

⁴¹ One of French’s pupils in April 1830 refers to the “nearly nine months” she had spent under his teaching, which implies that French was at Heath in the fall of 1829 according to the standard pattern of Heath’s academic year. See Esther Thayer to M. French, Apr. 6, 1830, FFP.

⁴² “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 4: 98.

You are now situated in a very responsible station. Remember that to your care now is committed the young and immortal mind. The object of a teacher should be twofold—to improve the understanding and mend the heart. Improve the understanding as much as you may, if you neglect the heart you have done very little good. Neither can a good heart effect much unless connected with an improved understanding.⁴³

Ballard's advice succinctly summarized what evangelical Congregationalists and Presbyterians—and for that matter Episcopalians—saw to be an essential, necessary union of evangelism and education,⁴⁴ and French applied himself to both. It is likely that he taught many of the various intellectual subjects on offer at academies as described in the previous section, possibly including Latin and Greek. French also owned (presumably through a grant from his father) and used an “apparatus”—that is, a collection of teaching aids for the various branches of “geography,” which included the sciences.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, he made a more pronounced impact mending students' hearts than improving their minds. In both of French's spring terms—in 1829, and in 1830 with his female teaching assistant J. W. Billings—revival broke out as French's students responded to their teachers' exhortations. At the times that the revival fire burned the hottest, attention to spiritual matters trumped all other concerns, including teaching and studying. Following the pulse of revival, French was an evangelist first and a teacher

⁴³ James Ballard to M. French, Mar. 23, 1829, FFP. For Ballard's Heath and Bennington teaching stints, see *Memorial of the Rev. James Ballard*, 22-23.

⁴⁴ For Congregationalists/Presbyterians see, pp. 56-64. For Episcopalians see Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 33-34.

⁴⁵ Moses Miller to M. French, July 11, 1829, FFP; S. Thompson Allen to M. French, June 20, 1829, FFP; N. Brown to M. French, Mar. 29, 1830, FFP; J. W. Billings to M. French, June 3, 1830, FFP; James Ballard to M. French, June 7, 1830, FFP.

second.⁴⁶

The revival in the spring of 1830 at Heath was more intense and dramatic than 1829's. The school was not alone—1830 was the year that Charles Grandison Finney launched his landmark evangelistic ministry in Rochester, New York. Finney justly draws by far the most notice from historians⁴⁷ who write of the Great Revival of 1830-31 and its concomitant “new measures” of protracted meetings (usually for four successive days), anxious seats (a bench where attenders who worried about the state of their souls sat and received special attention in the meeting), and inquiry rooms (where the anxious could be counseled outside the meeting). But the spike in the Second Great Awakening in these years manifested itself far beyond Finney's reach—including in Vermont and western Massachusetts—and “Finneyite” revivalistic innovations were employed widely.⁴⁸

At the end of the 1830 spring term, French and Billings asked their students to write mementos for their teachers to remember them by.⁴⁹ Together with some unsolicited

⁴⁶ In 1830 a Heath student from the previous year reminded French, “You know last year you got entirely out of subjects.” But this was not a rebuke of French's evangelistic zeal, as the student suggested doctrines that could be taught in the course of academic lecturing that were “best calculated to get home conversion to the heart.” Also, French was by no means unique among his contemporary evangelical educators in abandoning regular instruction when revival hit. See Orson Squire Fowler to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP; Ringenberg, *Christian College*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 459-61; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 196-200; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848*, *The Oxford History of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 200-6; Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War*, *American Ways Series* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 58-63. Charles C. Cole, Jr. judiciously noted that Finney's prominence was part of a wider phenomenon. See Cole, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860*, *Columbia Studies in the Social Sciences* 580 (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 76-77.

⁴⁸ Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 56; Cole, *Social Ideas*, 80-83; also see below, pp. 70-72. It is also worth noting that the “new measures” associated with Finney were not wholly new; they were long-standing frontier camp-meeting devices moved indoors. See Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), esp. p. 247.

⁴⁹ M. French and J. W. Billings to their students, 1830 (date unknown), FFP.

testimonials from the students of 1829, these letters open a fascinating window into the hearts and minds of Congregationalist young people affected by the revival and suggestively hint at the nature of French's own spirituality during this time.

For these young Yankee evangelicals, religion was intrinsically emotional, and every step of the conversion process—the religious process that mattered far above any other—was identified and characterized by emotion almost (but not quite) to the neglect of any other dimension of the human person.⁵⁰ The most glaring and concerning sign that something was wrong in the spiritual condition of an individual, a church, or a community was “coldness” in their feelings toward Christ and about matters of eternal import. Sarah A. Brown, one of French's 1829 students, wrote to him after the spring term about her “present and past state of feeling on the subject of Religion.” She admitted that

I had but very little feeling at all as you probably would perceive towards the close of school, but when I saw the time had come that we must part it cast a gloom over my mind and I was brought to consider that I had rejected my best opportunity to seek my own salvation and that I had resisted the innumerable instructions and entreaties that had been impressed upon my mind. These pierced like arrows in my heart in the many hours of solitary reflection. I hope what [I] have heard is true concerning an interest in Christ, though I often greatly fear and despond on account of my present and past state of stupidity, my coldness on the subject. I think I have felt the love of Jesus but yet I would wish you not to feel confident of the truth. I am surrounded by many temptations and easily drawn away by the cares of the world, and I sometimes [fear] that at last I shall be found wanting.⁵¹

“Coldness” was a problem not only in the unconverted but also in those who professed regeneration but thence slid back into a dull religious mood. A Heath student who spent

⁵⁰ Cf. Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 56-60.

⁵¹ Sarah A. Brown to M. French, June 10, 1829, FFP.

the summer studying at Amherst reported that

We have a meeting Saturday evening which is pretty interesting, but there seem[s] to be a general coldness pervading the hearts of Christians, & I feel its effects upon my own feelings. I often revert to the pleasant time which we spent together in Heath with pleasure but when I compare my present feelings with those I then had I have reason to mourn & lament.⁵²

French himself felt the same doldrums in the summer after the 1830 revival as he rigorously examined the state of his own soul. For a short period that summer, he attempted to keep a journal of “Black Marks” with a daily record of sins in urgent need of correction. One entry reads,

I have let pass misimproved many opportunities for doing good during the past week—on[e?] in particular, I met on a bridge two fishermen—when I might have said a word which with the blessing of God would have done them good. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” came into my mind after I left them but then it was too late. The reason of my not thinking of improving this opportunity was in all probability owing to my not being seeking to do good as duty requires—

Have been too cold during the whole week—did not make my religious conversation at Doct[or] Dorr’s[?] personal enough—have sought to appear well before men rather than God. Have not been conscientious enough, not prayed enough—not done anything scarcely as I ought to [have] done[?]. Spent too little time in meditation and contemplation of the attributes of God. Have lived like a rebellious, thoughtless sinner!⁵³

Clearly, even after having led a successful revival of religion, French was not about to rest on his spiritual laurels, notwithstanding that he failed to keep up with this journal for more than a few scattered days, as he was not introspective by temperament. Yet this personal writing exemplifies the rigorous spiritual self-criticism that French had enjoined on his students.

⁵² S. Thompson Allen to M. French, June 20, 1829, FFP.

⁵³ Mansfield French, “Excerpta June 1830, M. French,” FFP.

The students who responded to his urgings eagerly, like the ones quoted above, manifested the emotional condition that was considered the crucial first step toward rectifying their spiritual problem: anxious concern about the danger posed to one's sinful soul should it remain "cold." This anxiety could be extreme. A former pupil asked rhetorically about a typical person under the influence of the Holy Spirit,

Why does the hand of the Sabbath School scholar tremble now, more than formerly, when he turns over the sacred pages? Why does his heart swell with indignation against God when he reads, "He that believeth not shall be damned"? Why does he spend sleepless nights, & with sighs, tears & a trembling heart look away to Jesus as his last & only hope? . . . But now the commandment comes home, sin revives & he is greatly distressed. He perceives that God is staring him in the face, that his flaming eyes pierce him *through & through*.⁵⁴

Such persons became urgently conscious of impending death and final judgment and the torment that awaited them if they had not changed by that time. As one confessed, "I have the unhappiness of informing you I am yet exposed to eternal punishment but I hope not all together unthoughtful about my present condition. But my situation is deplorable."⁵⁵ Students under this inner conviction, like Sarah Brown above, grieved at the length of time they had spent pursuing worldly interests while neglecting eternal matters. So did those who were later liberated from it.⁵⁶

Students under conviction arrived at their state of anxiety by being impressed with biblical doctrines that revealed their danger. Crucially, these expositions were more (though not less) than demonstrations that the sinner had broken a rule or failed to do his or her duty. Rather, they described the sinner's position and attitude in a relationship with

⁵⁴ Lowell Smith to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP (emphasis original).

⁵⁵ J. G. Davenport to M. French, 1830 (date unknown), FFP.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Sophronia Miller to M. French, Apr. 6, 1830, FFP.

a sovereign, personal God, a relationship that had always existed between Creator and creature even if the sinner had not yet acknowledged it. French's student Orson Squire Fowler outlined the problem:

For instance the character of God, holy, just, forgiving, but severe against all rebellion, and that justly. And how inconsistent, unreasonable and wicked it is to stand in rebellion to such a being—how unbecoming to be unreconciled to the laws by which the whole universe is governed, and then will come in the just, necessary consequences of breaking those, which all have done.

The crux of the problem consists not the sinner's actions but in the wicked interior motives and intentions from which actions spring:

Also the peculiar excellency and loveliness of the character of Christ, and then what must that person be, who does voluntarily hate him. The *motives* might be dwelt on, for if a man aiming at a panther, which was just ready to devour a man, should shoot the man, he would not be guilty though he had murdered, but if aiming at the man, he had hit the panther, he would be guilty of murder. Now the Sinner hates God, enough to hurl him from his throne, at best, he will not submit to his laws.

This continual hatred of God, constantly exhibited to God even if it is invisible and even passionless to the sinner him- or herself, is what requires eternal punishment. In fact, that unremitting hatred is what makes hell unceasingly painful:

The peculiar characteristics of Christ now compared with what they will be hereafter now lovely as a lamb but then to his enemies, will become the Lion of the Tribe of Juda, now inviting to him, then driving from him into everlasting fire, now accessible, and easily pacified, but then will accept no terms of peace. Tell them too, that this same thing which now so distresses them, hatred to God, will not cease to increase, of course their torments will not. How wretched then must the soul be, which can vent itself only in curses, and blasphemies.

Finally, the sinner is "weak, and of course dependent, and that on his enemy, God."

Unless a radical change occurs in the sinner's motives, he or she has no hope to escape

God's righteous anger—indeed, it is only God's pleasure and power that enables the blind

sinner to continue ignorantly rebelling through a mortal life that is swiftly coming to an end.⁵⁷

Jonathan Edwards' name is never mentioned in the nearly seven hundred manuscripts associated with Mansfield French in the French Family Papers, but his spirit suffuses the letters from Heath. In addition to the familiar Edwardsean concepts in Fowler's letter, other code words of the "New Divinity"—a version of Calvinism built on a selective reading of Edwards that flourished among Yankees in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries⁵⁸—appear in French's students' writings. For example, Sarah Maxwell uses Edwards' analogy of physical vision and his aesthetic theology to describe her spiritual conversion: "Christ has given light to the darkened understanding, and his beauty and excellencies of themselves [are] seen." Likewise, French was praised by his students for his "disinterested benevolence"—that is, his active concern for their well-being apart from any advantage that would accrue to himself.⁵⁹

The way out of the anxiety of conviction was not cognitive assent to the premise that only Christ could save oneself—French's correspondents were convinced of that already. Rather, initial proof of salvation was a warm feeling of attraction to Christ for the first time. Students who felt devoted love for Christ testified to their experience cautiously. One wrote,

I do cherish the hope that what you have said to me has not *and will not* be in

⁵⁷ Orson Squire Fowler to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP.

⁵⁸ Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 403-14; Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 601-24; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 135-49, 341-69.

⁵⁹ Sarah Maxwell to M. French, Apr. 3, 1830, FFP; Fanny A. White to M. French, Apr. 5, 1830, FFP.

vain, for it was while listening to your kind warnings, and entreaties that I was brought to see my situation, and *[illegible]* trust to give my heart to God. If I am ever permitted to sing the song of the redeemed, ever shall I reflect with pleasure indescribable, upon that happy hour when I was permitted to place myself under your instruction. . . .⁶⁰

Even in 1830 there remained enough respect for the inscrutable sovereignty of God not to put oneself into the camp of the regenerate with overweening confidence. Meanwhile, those who were too unsure to go even this far with their testimony as well as those who were convinced they were still unforgiven begged their teacher to continue to pray that they might believe in their hearts and be saved.⁶¹

It is difficult to know how much of what French's students wrote reflects his teaching and beliefs versus how much they brought with them from the instruction of Moses Miller, other clergy, and their parents. After all, French was an Episcopalian, and though Evangelical Episcopalians freely borrowed Edwardsean concepts from the general heritage of mid-eighteenth-century evangelicalism, they were not Calvinist Congregationalists. On the other hand, French experienced conversion and received instruction among Congregationalists in Bennington that impacted him spiritually and perhaps theologically. Evangelical Episcopalians were devotedly prorevival, but most esteemed restraint and decorum in revivals' conduct (as in fact did many Congregationalists). French, however, seems to have been more comfortable than most with the more open expressions of emotion of the new wave of Congregationalists and Presbyterians that included Finney. In any case, regardless of which religious tribe French

⁶⁰ Olarinda Allen to M. French, Apr. 5, 1830, FFP (emphasis original except for "[illegible]").

⁶¹ See, e.g., Fanny A. White to M. French, Apr. 5, 1830, FFP; J. G. Davenport to M. French, 1830 (date unknown), FFP.

resembled most, the young teacher was intentional about coaxing the onset of revival by urging the concepts of sin, faith and salvation on his students. He also probably shared the view that no matter how necessary his exhortations were and no matter how zealously he delivered them, conversions and revival themselves would not erupt without the movement of the Holy Spirit, so prayer was at least as important as preaching.⁶²

Evangelicals believed that when revival came, it began with a few Christians who were sorry for the spiritual apathy and moral and devotional slackness they had been exhibiting, because their hypocrisy “dishonored the religion I profess to love . . . [so] that some one has been induced by my example, to put off repentance.” Once these regretful believers recommitted themselves to the things of God, they would have a healthy influence on other believers and eventually on unbelievers as well.⁶³

Nevertheless, not all would come to salvation, and in fact many would openly resist the summons and oppose the revival. French almost certainly tasted this even during the period of his most thrilling success at Heath. Despite the eminent influence of Moses Miller and the strong support that he and other townspeople gave to French as the Heath Select School’s teacher, “the leading men in H[earth] are opposed to religious schools, and therefore they will use their influence to prevent them.” These men probably were not keen on paying for their children to attend a school where studies might be suspended indefinitely when revival broke out. If French had been willing to return in the fall of 1830 the antirevival element of the town would have been kept at bay—apparently

⁶² Holifield, *Theology in America*, 238-41; Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, 34-35; Orson Squire Fowler to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP; Lowell Smith to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP.

⁶³ Esther Thayer to M. French, Apr. 6, 1830, FFP; see also Lowell Smith to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP.

the dissatisfaction was not so great that the community was willing to risk starting the fall without a qualified teacher. But French decided to move on from Heath despite evangelical parents' pleas for him to return. His successor had no interest in religion, and the character of the school changed radically as French's ardent disciples abandoned Heath to study in other academies with an evangelical atmosphere.⁶⁴

Ohio: Education and the Mission to the West

Despite his success as Heath's revivalistic schoolmaster, Mansfield French had not given up the idea that his true calling was to ordained ministry as a foreign missionary or an Episcopal priest. He probably squeezed in more study around his terms teaching at Heath, but eventually a college or theological seminary degree was necessary to qualify him for the ministry.⁶⁵ Several of his friends were pursuing the same vocation, so their advice and persuasion likely influenced his decision. Middlebury College in Vermont was a strong possibility; he also considered skipping college altogether and proceeding directly to the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia. Yet in the end French followed his friend Heman Dyer to Kenyon College on the remote hill of Gambier, Ohio, an Evangelical Episcopalian outpost founded by Bishop of Ohio Philander Chase. Dyer chose Kenyon because he believed that his loyalty to the Protestant Episcopal Church demanded it. The fledgling denominational institution

⁶⁴ Sophronia Miller to M. French, Sept. 8, 1831, FFP; Moses Miller et al. to M. French, Mar. 26, 1831, FFP. Intense opposition to revivals was common in the 1830s; for more severe examples than French faced in Heath—but not entirely unlike what he faced years later—see Cole, *Social Ideas*, 83-90.

⁶⁵ E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 115-17.

could use new Episcopalian students, but Dyer also believed that studies in Ohio tended greatly toward the success of the Church in a way that other options would not. However, if French shared Dyer's views he had little opportunity to put them into practice like his friend did. In the spring of 1830, while he was wrestling over where to pursue ministerial education, French's eyes still bothered him. He attempted college anyway, but his visual impairment did not improve during his term at Kenyon in the fall of 1830, and he was soon forced to abandon his education for a second time and once again put his hopes for ordained ministry on hold indefinitely. French did not return home to New England, however. Instead he found a way to stay in the West by means of the teaching profession.⁶⁶

In 1830 Luther G. Bingham, the Congregationalist pastor in Marietta, Ohio, founded the Marietta Institute of Education as a replacement to the local Muskingum Academy, whose burgeoning student body had outgrown its building's capacity. According to the institute's first prospectus, Bingham had high ambitions for his school, which consisted of four departments. The Infant School accepted children as young as age two and taught them the rudiments of a broad range of subjects. Once they became capable of using books for study, they moved up to the Primary School and after that the High School. Bingham "intended that [the High School] shall be equal to the best Academies and High Schools of the East," with a broad, rigorous, and academic (in the

⁶⁶ Heman Dyer to M. French, Dec. 8, 1827, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Dec. 24, 1827, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Feb. 22, 1828, FFP; William Perkins and Anson B. Hard to M. French, Apr. 11, 1828, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Dec. 13, 1828, FFP; William Perkins to M. French, Apr. 15, 1830, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, June 21, 1830, FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 74. According to his son-in-law George Lansing Taylor, French was the principal of the Preparatory Department at Kenyon during this brief sojourn. See G. L. Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," FFP.

modern sense of the term) curriculum that included classical languages. Finally, the Young Ladies' School was to provide the highest level of education for female graduates of the High School—in effect a parallel to a male college. Subject matter included the next level of the High School subjects plus “others . . . which are peculiarly suitable and important in Female Education.” In addition, the Writing School for instruction in penmanship was a separate unit of the Institute available to students of any department at extra cost. Bingham planned that the whole Institute would be housed in a “spacious and commodious building” with four rooms for study, three for recitation (oral examination), and one for writing and that “[a] graduate of Ohio University of competent qualifications will conduct the recitations of the High School and the illustrations.”⁶⁷

Bingham's aspirations for the Marietta Institute went further than institutional strength; they also included educational technique built on the progressive theory associated with Swiss theorist and reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Bingham advertised that each department was richly equipped with an “apparatus” of teaching aids. The “extensive apparatus” for the High School cost two hundred dollars⁶⁸ and included tools to teach chemistry, geometry, astronomy, and natural philosophy, as well as a set of the most recent and detailed maps of the United States and the rest of the world. The apparatus for the Infant School—which included an orrery, maps, charts, spelling cards, biological and geological specimens, and pictures—was crucial for

⁶⁷ Martin R. Andrews, *History of Marietta and Washington County, Ohio and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing, 1902), 186-90.

⁶⁸ A dollar in 1830 was worth roughly twenty dollars in 2010. In addition, the standard of living was far lower in 1830, so the value of an inflation-adjusted dollar in proportion to a household's annual income was much greater than it is today. See Tom Cloud, “Historical Value of U.S. Dollar (Estimated),” MyKindred.com, <http://mykindred.com/cloud/TX/Documents/dollar/index.php?cyear=2010> (accessed December 5, 2013).

teaching the department's very young pupils. Bingham employed three teachers to work with the seventy-five students in the Infant School simultaneously; a common school would have had only one. Even the system of discipline was progressive; even for the youngest students, Bingham entirely prohibited corporal punishment in favor of appealing to the child's sense of right and wrong in order to cultivate their internal motivation to act appropriately—a neat pedagogical application of Common Sense Realism. As another progressive element, in 1831 the male students of the High School organized a “Manual Labor Association” for “the promotion of health and vigor, both of body and mind, by a regular system of manual exercise.”⁶⁹

In early 1831, French bought into a half-share of the Marietta Institute of Education and he and Bingham became joint proprietors, and though he briefly pursued starting his own school in Zanesville, Ohio soon after settling in Marietta, he quickly concluded that the prospects were not as bright there and he stayed with Bingham's venture instead.⁷⁰ The wet-behind-the-ears twenty-one-year-old must have seemed to Luther Bingham to be a less than ideal business partner. Bingham certainly would have desired a man who had completed college, perhaps even an alumnus of Andover Theological Seminary, the flagship theological school of New Divinity Congregationalists. French had lower educational credentials than the Ohio University graduate Bingham hoped to get to examine students in the High School. On the other

⁶⁹ Andrews, *History of Marietta*, 187-92. For Marietta's manual labor, cf. Ringenberg, *Christian College*, 65, 77; Garth M. Rosell, “A Speckled Bird: Charles G. Finney's Contribution to Higher Education,” *Fides et Historia* 25 (Summer 1993): 60-61.

⁷⁰ Israel Ward Andrews, *Washington County, and the Early Settlement of Ohio; Being the Centennial Historical Address, before the Citizens of Washington County* (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thompson, 1877), 48; M. B. Cushing to M. French, May 5, 1831, FFP.

hand, French had been thoroughly trained in good academies, which fully qualified him as a teacher, and he carried references from Heath attesting to his competence as an instructor and, equally important, his skill as a revivalist.⁷¹ French brought some advantages too. His Heath experience and personal leanings fell right in line with Bingham's as an evangelical Congregationalist, but the fact that French remained a member of the Protestant Episcopal Church potentially widened the Institute's appeal to draw in Episcopalians as well as Congregationalists and Presbyterians (two denominations who at that time were conjoined in the West through a "Plan of Union"⁷²). French's greatest selling point as a joint proprietor, however—probably the decisive one—was simple: he had money.

Thanks to Joshua French's largesse and the prosperity of generations of Frenches, Mansfield had means well beyond those of the typical twenty-one-year-old in 1831. In this Mansfield was exceedingly fortunate for more than the obvious reasons. He was like an unprecedented number of young men of his generation who upon coming of age were impelled or compelled to wander, experiment, take risks, suffer setbacks, survive disease, revise plans, and generally try to find their way in an increasingly fluid world with many opportunities, much hardship, frequent disasters, and few sure things. Unlike most of his peers, however, Mansfield had considerable parental support and resources to rely on.⁷³

⁷¹ Moses Miller et al. to M. French, Mar. 26, 1831, FFP.

⁷² Congregationalists and Presbyterians had made the Plan of Union in 1801 to coordinate efforts to win the West, which made their churches in Ohio essentially dually affiliated until the Union broke down in 1837. French and his Ohio correspondents used the terms "Congregationalist" and "Presbyterian" more or less interchangeably, though they used the label "Presbyterian" more often. See Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 456-58.

⁷³ Scott, "Abolition," 53-55.

It is impossible to quantify French's wealth at many points in time and difficult to know just how much belonged to him personally versus what Joshua gave to Mansfield at the latter's request. But all told Mansfield's assets were significant, which his correspondence hints at in various ways. In 1829 soon after French departed for Heath, his teacher James Ballard told him of his desire to raise two thousand dollars for a new building for his seminary in Bennington. "Perhaps you would like to assist me," Ballard wrote. "If so will you not write soon and let me know if you would let me have four or five hundred dollars? It would be a great accommodation to me. You can take it out at any time that you shall choose after two years." The nonchalance with which Ballard asked his then-nineteen-year-old former student—not his student's father—for such a sum is striking. Mansfield also owned plots of land, presumably in Manchester, that Joshua secured tenant farmers for, and once he got going in Marietta the younger French was eager to sell those lands to invest in his new enterprise. Not long after Mansfield French arrived in Marietta he bought a house and quickly sold it for a profit. In 1832 he declared, "I hope in five years, if blessed, to be able to increase my property to \$10,000, the interest of which will be \$600 a year, a sum abundantly large to support" his family. Financial independence by age twenty-seven was no small feat, but French thought he might achieve it. He was following in his father's footsteps, and by his calculation his net worth was halfway to his goal. "But," he piously and circumspectly added, "this is all a dream—in 5 yrs I may be in my grave, or my money have taken wings and have fled

away.”⁷⁴ However, in 1831 he did have money, and Luther Bingham needed it—his institute’s unbuilt building and apparatuses were not cheap. So the young French and the somewhat more seasoned clergyman united as the proprietors of Marietta’s ascendant school. Business aside, the two became friends and still warmly corresponded over forty years later—Bingham wrote the last extant letter that French received in his lifetime.⁷⁵

Judging from a second, later attempt he made to get a college degree,⁷⁶ French did not believe teaching to be his ideal vocational path—ordained ministry was his true calling and education was a fallback, as indeed it has been for many aspiring professionals through the centuries. But if French was disheartened by the eye problems that diverted him from his goal, he did not hint at it in writing that we possess. To the contrary, there is good reason to believe that even if teaching was a second choice for him personally, French viewed education and ministry as equally crucial for a grand mission that inspired him. Understanding this grand mission is critical for ascertaining French’s motives for action not only during this period but also later in his life (albeit in modified forms).

Evangelicals among Congregationalists and Presbyterians especially, but also among New England’s Episcopalians and Baptists, bundled several concepts about improving humanity into an indivisible whole. Note again James Ballard’s admonition to Mansfield French: “Improve the understanding as much as you may, if you neglect the

⁷⁴ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 60-61; James Ballard to M. French, Mar. 23, 1829, FFP; Joshua French to M. French, Jan. 5, 1830, FFP; Joshua French to M. French, Aug. 8, 1831, FFP; Joshua French to M. French, Mar. 11, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Jan. 3, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 27, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP.

⁷⁵ Luther G. Bingham to M. French, Feb. 23, 1876, FFP.

⁷⁶ See pp. 76-77.

heart you have done very little good. Neither can a good heart effect much unless connected with an improved understanding.” In an individual, spiritual reformation required intellectual development to be of any use, and vice versa. “Mending the heart” itself had two essential components: conversion (spiritual regeneration by the Holy Spirit) and moral development (evidenced in “disinterested benevolence” and detachment from worldly pursuits). Again, as French demonstrated in Heath, both conversion and moral development, though centered in the affections (emotions and preferences) that drove the will, were stimulated through the mind’s apprehension of the truths of Scriptural doctrine and moral philosophy made available through education. In addition, evangelicals believed that the chief instrument by which individuals experienced the spiritual reformation of conversion was community-wide revival marked not only by mass conversion but also the reformation of a town’s morals. Individual improvement was thus inseparable from community improvement. By the same token, community improvement was inseparable from national improvement—indeed, without the moral and self-disciplined citizenry that only regeneration could produce, the United States’ republican experiment in liberty was doomed. National improvement required both the conversion and reform of millions of individuals and the reformation of the contours of society as a whole—just laws that made for a neo-Puritan righteous commonwealth, touching, for example, alcohol consumption, Sabbath observance, and for the most radical evangelicals, slavery. This agenda could only be advanced through a compendium of interlocking institutions spread over the vast country: congregations of the regenerate that educated their members through Sabbath schools; educational institutions that urged

students' conversion as they prepared them to teach others; voluntary benevolent organizations that reached the lost with the gospel, reformed persistent sinners, and improved the lot of the poor and marginalized; governments that paved the way for the evangelical agenda, for instance by mandating compulsory, generically Protestant education and stopping mail delivery on Sunday; and missions boards that sent believers to spread the awakening across oceans.

This last was because national improvement was inseparable from global transformation. Evangelicals were obsessed with the imminent coming of the utopic Millennium prophesied in the Bible. As New Divinity thinkers pictured this era, every inhabited place on the planet would continually evince the right belief, spiritual fervor, moral conduct, religious devotion, social order, and God-graced health and prosperity of a New England town at the peak of revival. These "postmillennialists" believed that after this period Christ would personally consummate the Holy Spirit's work through believers by returning from heaven bodily, triggering the resurrection of the dead and final judgment.⁷⁷

The Yankee evangelical mind linked conversion and moral development; affections and intellect; the individual and society; church and state; community, nation, and world; and present and future into a necessarily coherent whole. It was not a monistic vision in which each *was* the other but rather a relational one in which each required and implied the other. So long as Mansfield French was breathing this atmosphere, trading the

⁷⁷ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 193-228, 279-80, 325-29; Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 24-31, 86-99, 115-60; Cole, *Social Ideas*, 71-164; James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 1-14.

priesthood for teaching could never be seen as merely making do with secular employment. Both occupations were essential to the awesome work of God.

Despite Yankee evangelicals' concern for the wider world, expressed in the activities of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, they were more acutely anxious over the state of "the valley of the Mississippi," the West. This sentiment and the urge to go west and do something about it was eloquently expressed by one of French's Heath students, Sophronia Miller:

I have long felt the deepest interest in the great "western valley", and have been astonished, that those who possessed necessary qualifications, should hesitate a moment with regard to leaving their own homes, and laboring in that wilderness. It would seem that an object so important as that of instructing the ignorant, pouring light into the darkened mind—and dispelling the thick mists of superstition and bigotry that always brood over the mind unenlightened by science, and unacquainted with religion, should call forth exertions of every benevolent heart. The diffusion of knowledge, particularly the knowledge of the true God, a belief of his word, and a hearty acceptance of the Savior, is the only sure way of securing the best interests of our beloved country—It is the only way in which we can preserve inviolate our invaluable liberties. O! then how noble the object, how worthy of our attention, and how pure must be the enjoyment of that person, who is willing to sacrifice everything else to the accomplishment of this object. With regard to myself, I have felt, for the year past, the most intense desire to be qualified to labor at the west—and I have felt a strong confidence, that the time would sometime come, when there would be an opening for me in that region, and I should feel it my duty to engage in the great work of diffusing light, in regions now shrouded in darkness.⁷⁸

The metaphor of darkness and light—which Miller was by no means alone in using—is a powerful one, because it touches multiple elements of the evangelical mission. It was a favorite analogy of Jonathan Edwards to contrast the spiritually unresponsive condition of the unregenerate with the awakened, direct perception of God

⁷⁸ Sophronia Miller to M. French, Sept. 8, 1831, FFP.

that accompanied regeneration, and it was passed down through the New Divinity.⁷⁹ Light was also a flexible metaphor long applied by religious and non-religious alike to moral conduct and to learning.

Similarly, “darkness” was a broad enough concept to describe the several obstacles to the Millennium found in the West. As in Vermont a generation earlier, darkness referred to “infidelity”—basic unbelief in the Christian message—and immorality, most prominently drunkenness.⁸⁰ But darkness also meant ignorance even among those who could not reasonably be called unbelieving sinners. Before Calvinist and Episcopalian missionaries plunged over the Appalachians, other denominations had already reaped enormous gains saving the lost on the frontier. On the one theological side Arminian Methodists were hard at work. On the other side Presbyterians and especially Baptists multiplied—these traditional Calvinists were suspicious of the scholasticism of the New Divinity and later of the novel ecclesiology implied by the benevolence and missions organizations. Restorationists (known simply as “Christians” or “Disciples of Christ”) emerged who sought to move beyond denominations once and for all. All these groups (except the Old Presbyterians) appealed to the poor, uneducated, and marginalized not through paternalistic benevolence and instruction but by democratically affirming their ability to hear God and interpret the Scriptures for themselves without the strictures of a creed. Ironically, they also tended to elevate individual religious leaders who wielded great popular authority. To French’s description of the society he encountered in Ohio,

⁷⁹ McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 377-82.

⁸⁰ For the temperance movement as a key component of the Yankee evangelical mission see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 195-98; Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 124-29.

Moses Miller replied sympathetically, “The field you allude to in your letter I know must be dreary. Deep rooted prejudices against ministers and benevolent operations are formed and nurtured by religious demagogues and infidels.” Yankee evangelicals intended to use education to win benighted Western believers, not just unbelievers, to the right way.⁸¹

But in the early 1830s neither infidels nor populist believers in the West alarmed French’s circle like the threat of Roman Catholicism did. To Yankee evangelicals, “darkness” finally meant Catholic “superstition.” For centuries loyal Protestants had considered the Pope to be the Antichrist and more recently the chief human enemy of God’s plan to bring about the Millennium, but two new developments elevated the danger. First, in the wake of the vicious anticlericalism of the French Revolution, Rome took a hard line against political liberalism generally, including American democracy. Second, Catholicism in America was growing, partly by immigration (though at nowhere near the rate to come in the late 1840s) and partly by vigorous evangelistic enterprises of their own. Much as the small but swelling number of freethinkers in the 1790s portended a major crisis to evangelicals, so the few but multiplying Catholics west of the Appalachians absorbed their fearful attention. Rumor took on a life of its own; Lowell Smith, a friend of French’s studying at the Presbyterian seminary in Auburn, New York, wrote,

I do not know whether you take the “Protestant,” or not. It is a weekly paper published at N.Y. Its object is to expose the proceedings of “Roman Catholics.” It is enough to make the blood run cold to read some of the accounts which are published. The Catholics have already threatened the editor’s life. I do not know but the “Inquisition” will be acted over in America!! May heaven forbid it.

⁸¹ Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 15-16, 32-37; Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*; Moses Miller et al. to M. French, Mar. 26, 1831, FFP.

Perhaps you will say I need not be alarmed; we live in a “land of liberty”. True, but the *liberty* is dreadfully abused. “When the wicked bare rule the people mourn.” How does *liberty & slavery* compare? *Protection & oppression*? *Reverencing the Sabbath & violating it*? . . . Did you ever think, my friend that, our *Unitarian neighbours* would ever become *Roman Catholics*? I quote the following sentence from the “Protestant.” “There is a good understanding between *Papists & Liberalists*; & a correspondence has been carried on between Boston & Rome, in which *Liberalists* have acknowledged themselves the *dutiful children* of the *Pope!!!*” And have we nothing to fear? “A man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” If christians were ever called to act for the defence of the truth, it is now.

Smith’s conclusion to this alarming news is telling: “Permit me here to inquire if it may not be your duty to go & establish a school in some part of the great Western valley?”⁸²

Evangelicals believed schools to be powerful instruments of enlightenment⁸³ for two reasons. First, an evangelical academy in a Western town was often the only secondary school in a fairly broad area, which made it the only choice for nearby youths who wanted more education but could not afford to travel east. An evangelical primary school was usually the only option for well-off parents who distrusted the quality of local common schools. Thus, students of any and no religious persuasion were funneled into institutions under the instruction of teachers who proclaimed the gospel, taught evangelical doctrine, demanded moral uprightness, and urged revival. As evangelistic organizations, then, schools were at least as effective as churches. Second, more evangelical schools were needed in the West to mint more evangelical educators for the West. This certainly included clergy to pastor new churches in every settlement sprouting

⁸² Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 364-66; Lowell Smith to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP (emphasis original); see also S. L. Matthews to M. French, June 16, 1830, FFP; Elisha Smith to M. French, May 12, 1832, FFP.

⁸³ For the campaign to establish schools to conquer the aforementioned obstacles to Christianity in the West, see Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing upon the College Movement*, American Education: Its Men, Ideas and Institutions, Lawrence A. Cremin, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 66-75.

west of the Appalachians, but it also included teachers for still more colleges and academies as well as common schools. It could be argued that teachers were more effective missionaries to the West than clergy were. Teachers took less time to train, and they had more access to people in their formative years. Also, unlike clergy, teachers could be recruited from among women as well as men, greatly increasing the supply of workers. Women may even have been preferable for that vocation because they were widely believed to be innately morally superior to men and because their expected role of childrearing logically extended to educating other people's children. Students in evangelical academies, women and men, were trained to believe that their education implied a missionary obligation to educate humankind. So important did this mission become that some academies in the 1830s changed their names to advertise themselves as "teachers' seminaries."⁸⁴

This grand mission of evangelistic education, or educational evangelism, was in the broad view what impelled Philander Chase to found Kenyon College, and it convinced Heman Dyer that he was duty-bound to study at Kenyon for the sake of the Protestant Episcopal Church and the Western inhabitants without its ministrations.⁸⁵ This was also what kept Mansfield French in Ohio when his eyes brought his college career to an end. Moses Miller and the converted laymen at Heath were eager to bring him back,

⁸⁴ Johnson, *Redeeming America*, 26-27; Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 78-89; Ringenberg, *Christian College*, 58-62; Nash, *Women's Education*, 55-59, 66-67.

⁸⁵ George Franklin Smythe, *Kenyon College: Its First Century*, reprint with new introduction (Gambier, OH: Kenyon College, 2001), 40-45, 74-76. Chase's first purpose for Kenyon College was to prepare homegrown ministers in Ohio in order to prevent Episcopalian settlers' clergyless parishes from collapsing and with them the denomination in that state (5-7, 14-17; also Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 84). For Kenyon's missionary activity and revivalism in Dyer's and French's days, see Smythe, *Kenyon College*, 84-85.

and if French was looking to develop a school as a long-term profession he was assured of success there. He might even have launched his own enterprise in Manchester where his landholdings were. But something held him in Ohio—his ambition to do good in a wide-open field where both the opportunities and the “darkness” were vast.

Despite the enormous value that Yankee evangelicals placed on education, there remained a tense ambivalence toward education within evangelical students. It was natural for them to exalt education unequivocally in the face of the ignorance and superstition that they found rampant in the West. But doing so exposed them to perilous temptation in the East. While Yankee evangelicals viewed education as an essential complement to salvation, liberal Unitarians held that, in a manner of speaking, education *was* salvation.⁸⁶ Against them, evangelicals asserted that spiritual transformation, begun by conversion and continued through moral development, was the senior partner to education. Education was alluring to many young evangelicals in a way that threatened to eclipse the spiritual life, so they conscientiously reminded themselves and each other that learning by itself was worldliness. A student at Middlebury College struggled with this temptation and admonished his friend Mansfield French about its danger:

[M]any parents are satisfied, yea delighted, when their children attend to the acquisition of that knowledge, only, which pertains to the present moment, to the utter exclusion of all thoughts on eternal realities. How wrong men frequently are in their estimation of things! At such blindness, *I seem now to wonder* and it is indeed the height of folly, but when I revert to past experience, I find such in my course of life. Your remark is true that (upon reflection,) [you] “know too well the folly of such students,” as are deeply engaged in laying up that knowledge which shall vanish away, “to lower down my watch and copy their example”; yet I have, ever since I have made a profession of religion, been so, so enamoured with transitory objects, so bewitched by the allurements of study, so elated with the

⁸⁶ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 696-700.

idea of clinching the hill of Science, that I have often lost sight of the object, towards which, all my efforts should be directed—viz. of preparing for usefulness to the church and the world and labouring for the good of immortal souls. . . . I shall . . . discipline the mind a little, to put it in a state of acquiring knowledge. But this will be of small avail unless the heart be devoted to religion and make all other things but secondary objects. . . . Upon sober reflection, I ought not and cannot envy those who spend their lives in literary pursuits. “If there be tongues they shall cease; if there be knowledge it shall vanish away.” A person might spend his whole life in gathering Science and learn the world no better at his death, for his having lived in it. We may attempt to cull the flowers of literature, or, as others say, to bask in the sunny fields of intellectual pleasure and Elysian happiness; but the hour is coming when all such pursuits will be altogether “less than the small dust of the balance.” If we were to live forever, we might then indulge in inactive literary pursuit, but as Horace says, “*Linquenda tellus et domus et placens uxor!*” [“must leave earth and home and pleasing wife,” Ode 2.14].⁸⁷

Despite his friends’ concern that French not overprioritize intellectual development, their anxieties reflected their own struggles more than his—their admonitions may have been heroic attempts to talk themselves into the right attitude. Mansfield French was not immune to worldliness, but intellectual worldliness probably lacked appeal to him. He was an intelligent and an educated man, but he was no philosopher. As we will later see, French’s mode of Christian thought, at least after the turning point he reached in the mid-1840s, revolved around biblical analogies, especially narrative analogies, rather than theological, metaphysical, or ethical abstractions, although he was well-versed in the latter and taught them to others. He was learned but indifferent to the life of the mind except where he could derive a moral lesson. French’s scholarly friends aspired to lives of intellectual self-denial and complete employment of their cerebral gifts in “useful,” pragmatic, ministerial purposes. French actually lived that

⁸⁷ S. L. Matthews to M. French, June 16, 1830, FFP (emphasis original); see also Heman Dyer to M. French, Oct. 3, 1827, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Mar. 18, 1828, FFP; William Perkins and Anson B. Hard to M. French, Apr. 11, 1828, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Mar. 22, 1832, FFP.

life, probably without the inner conflict they suffered. He was a practical-minded activist who spent his life concerned with the spiritual condition of individuals, the provision and management of organizations, and the just treatment of the oppressed by the government. Education was his tool, not his mistress.

Marietta and Reports from Afar

When the people of the new United States moved westward after the Revolution, they brought their cultures with them and replicated many of the features and mores of their Eastern homelands in their new settlements. New England Yankees settled a swath of territory along the southern shores of the Great Lakes: upper New York State (especially its central and western parts where the Dutch had barely penetrated); the northern margins of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa; and Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Yankees also clustered in a few pockets south of this band, one of which was in southeastern Ohio.⁸⁸ Its center was Marietta on the Ohio River, the first permanent white settlement in the state. There French threw himself into his new enterprise, the Marietta Institute of Education, with gusto. His first major success in this undertaking may have caught him by surprise: he found a wife.

Austa Malinda Winchell was the daughter of Silas Winchell, a deacon in the Congregationalist church (alternately considered an elder in the Presbyterian church) in Granville, Ohio, a hub of the Yankee enclave northeast of Columbus.⁸⁹ Austa was

⁸⁸ Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 160-65; Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 71, 850-52.

⁸⁹ Henry Bushnell, *The History of Granville, Licking County, Ohio* (Columbus: n.p., 1889), 130; William Thomas Utter, *Granville: The Story of an Ohio Village* (Granville, OH: Granville Historical Society, Denison University, 1956), 112-13, 118-19.

studying at Luther Bingham's school in Marietta when Mansfield arrived from Kenyon as the new co-proprietor and teacher in early 1831, and love blossomed between them while they boarded in the same house that spring. By June they decided to get married, and soon Mansfield wrote to Austa's father to ask for his blessing on the match. As it happened gossip about the engagement had already traveled from Marietta to Granville, and with confidence in their daughter's judgment the Winchells signalled their approval.⁹⁰

However, some time would pass before the wedding, because Mansfield sent Austa from the Marietta Institute to continue her education at Ipswich Female Seminary in Ipswich, Massachusetts, one of the nation's premier evangelical higher-educational institutions for women. The chief teachers and administrators at Ipswich were Zilpah P. Grant and Mary Lyon, two star students of Congregationalist clergyman and pioneer of women's education Joseph Emerson. Grant and Lyon had lofted Ipswich's academics to a high level and zealously inculcated evangelical spirituality and morality, middle-class manners, and missionary duty in their students, many of whom went on to teach both in the West and overseas (for example, the Sandwich [i.e., Hawaiian] Islands). The success of this pro-revival evangelical enterprise greatly irked its many Unitarian neighbors in the town, but it drew students from a wide area. Mansfield French had been impressed with Ipswich since his time at Heath the year before; he had sought to hire a teacher from Ipswich while at Heath (and later at Marietta), and his Heath assistant J. W. Billings spent the summer studying there. Both Mansfield and Austa desired that Austa get more

⁹⁰ Heman Dyer to M. French, June 18, 1831, FFP; M. French to Silas Winchell, July 8, 1831, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, July 15, 1831, FFP.

education in order to be equipped to help him teach, as academies were frequently a family affair, owned and operated by a married couple who taught most or even all of the subjects.⁹¹

At Ipswich Austa devoted herself to arithmetic, geometry, American history, politics, mental philosophy, and music and even attempted painting. Each day she and her fellow students were trained spiritually with a Bible lesson and religious exercises and physically with calisthenics, the cutting edge of education in the 1820s. But Austa's journey proved not to be only for her education but also for Mansfield's. He queried her about what Mary Lyon and the other teachers taught and how they taught it, how Lyon provided moral instruction and discipline, and what the students' routines were so that he could institute best practices at Marietta. Austa gave him detailed replies. Mansfield even explored having Lyon come to Marietta, presumably as a consultant.⁹²

Mansfield and Austa were deeply and sincerely in love. Mansfield was eager to meet all of Austa's financial needs, and Austa was grateful to have a loving protector. Even though their long letters were filled mostly with practical details, news, and discourses on educational method, the couple also exposed the warmth of their affection for each other in them. Yet this exposure was tempered by notable restraint. Articulation

⁹¹ Nash, *Women's Education*, 48-49, 58-59; M. French to A. Winchell, Feb. 28, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Nov. 6, 1831, FFP; Mary Lyon to M. French, Feb. 10, 1830, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 7, 1831, FFP; J. W. Billings to M. French, June 3, 1830, FFP. Mansfield French became even more impressed with Catherine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary than he was with Ipswich; see M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 27, 1832, FFP.

⁹² A. Winchell to M. French, Oct. 13, 1831, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Nov. 6, 1831, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Jan. 3, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Feb. 17, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Feb. 28, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Feb. 17, 1832, FFP. Two of these letters (Oct. 13, 1831 and Jan. 3, 1832) indicate that Zilpah Grant was ill and away from the school during Austa's residence in Ipswich, and Lyon was administering the institution in her absence. For calisthenics, see Nash, *Women's Education*, 94-97.

of physical desire and praise of outer beauty are nearly absent from their correspondence. The outlet for their expressions of affection was spiritual discourse as they tried deliberately to view their love in light of God's providence, supremacy, and mission for their lives. They each struggled against adoring the other more than God, not to mention the distraction of other worldly cares; Mansfield feared that God might strike his beloved dead by sickness in order to remove the temptation of idolatry. When either of them suggested that death might be close—whether because of illness or out of pious circumspection about the future—the other would become alarmed and require assurance that their beloved was still basically well. Each was also concerned at causing the other distress by what they wrote. As the months of 1831 and 1832 passed with many miles between them, their ardor kept rising and often their worry with it.⁹³

Meanwhile, French busied himself with the business of his and Bingham's thriving institute. He spent most of his teaching time in the High School, where he augmented academic instruction with moral exhortations. As an administrator he labored to find suitable teachers and to implement insights from Austa's reports about Ipswich. He devoted considerable energy to the expansion of the growing school. French sent his friend Heman Dyer on a trip east to raise money for a new building—a task for which Dyer was poorly suited—and soon Bingham took his own trip to secure funding. It was common at the time for institutions to span the gaps between private/for-profit, private/non-profit, chartered/non-profit, and public/governmental ownership, especially in cases

⁹³ M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 5, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 7, 1831, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Nov. 6, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 3, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, Jan. 3, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 27, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Mar. 14, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 5, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, July 23, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, July 29, 1832, FFP.

where private investment facilitated public benefit. Accordingly, in the spring of 1832 French and Bingham formed a board of trustees to solicit and ensure the proper disbursement of publicly collected donations for their privately owned institute, specifically for the new building. A group of prosperous locals readily endorsed the plan and contributed to the cause.⁹⁴

The one achievement French could not accomplish at Marietta was to replicate his success as a revivalist at Heath despite his efforts at prayer and exhortation.⁹⁵ While revival fires went unignited in Marietta, however, they blazed in many other communities across the Yankee Nation during the Great Revival of 1830-31. While Charles Grandison Finney preached in Rochester, French read reports from friends and family of the awakening bursting forth in Deposit, New York (March 1830); Bennington, Vermont (October 1830); Hermitage, Pennsylvania (winter 1830-June 1831); Columbus and Gambier, Ohio (i.e., Kenyon College) and vicinity (March-April 1831); Cambridge, White Creek, and Salem, New York and Arlington and Dorset, Vermont (April-August 1831); and Whitingham, Vermont and Colrain, Heath, and Hawley, Massachusetts and vicinity (August-October 1831).⁹⁶

⁹⁴ M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 5, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 7, 1831, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Nov. 14, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 27, 1832, FFP; David Thayer to M. French, Feb. 24, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Feb. 28, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Mar. 14, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP; Andrews, *History of Marietta*, 192-94. Howe gives examples of various public-private ventures prior to the Panic of 1837 in *What Hath God Wrought*, 247, 292, 300, 426, 951.

⁹⁵ M. French to A. Winchell, Sept. 23, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Oct. 7, 1831, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 3, 1832, FFP.

⁹⁶ Lowell Smith to M. French, Mar. 27, 1830, FFP; David Thayer to M. French, Oct. 22, 1830, FFP; Sherlock Anson Bronson to M. French, June 29, 1831, FFP; Moses Miller et al. to M. French, Mar. 26, 1831, FFP; John Kendrick to M. French, Apr. 4, 1831, FFP; Joshua French to M. French, Apr. 27, 1831, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, July 15, 1831, FFP; Joshua French to M. French, Aug. 18, 1831, FFP; David Thayer to M. French, Aug. 29 & Oct. 7, 1831, FFP; Luther Temple to M. French, Jan. 14, 1832, FFP.

Undoubtedly the news that brought French the most joy was that notoriously “cold” Manchester, Vermont finally caught flame in July 1831, and the revival extended into the following spring. French’s Heath student Sophronia Miller, who had gone on to teach in Manchester, wrote him a revealing account of how the revival came about:

There is a great change in the religious feeling when you left, in all parts of the town. Things continued in nearly the same state for one year after I came, ’tis true we have been a little encouraged to hope for better times, occasionally, but no sooner were our expectations raised than they were again dashed. Thus we continued along till about the first of last May, the time I returned from Heath, when some few of us began to feel more than ordinarily, the importance of arousing ourselves, and making some united effort. Several things were resorted to, and among the rest, morning daily prayer meetings were established and attended with a great degree of interest. We feel that the prayer of faith was offered up there, for from that time the Lord evidently began to pour out his Spirit, and sinners began to tremble. The church began to feel that they were unworthy to bear the Christian name, and to awaken from their long slumbers. The spirit of God began to breathe, Christians were stirred up to call on God mightily, and finally a protracted meeting was called. This meeting continued six days, during which time a most fervent, agonising spirit of prayer prevailed. [damage] cloud of incense went up before God continually, and in answering them, the blessing of heaven was poured down immediately. I [damage] [never] before witnessed such a display of the power and grace of God. We seemed to be walking in the thick cloud of the divine presence. The meeting with all its attendant circumstances was inexpressibly solemn.—Four hundred different persons from this and other towns who were present at the meeting took the anxious seats, and more than one hundred hopeful converts. Among them are some of the most hardened and unlikely persons in the place.⁹⁷

The revival even touched the formalists in Zion Episcopal Church; Abraham Bronson’s dogged ministry was finally paying off. Overjoyed, Heman Dyer copied to French a list that he had received from his brother back home of all the “hopefully pious” in the town whose names he recognized.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sophronia Miller to M. French, Sept. 8, 1831, FFP. See also Sophronia Miller to M. French, Mar. 5, 1832, FFP.

⁹⁸ Joshua French to M. French, Mar. 11, 1832, FFP; Heman Dyer to M. French, Sept. 24, 1831, FFP.

On Dyer's list were Solomon and Laura Benedict, French's brother-in-law and sister. Solomon wrote to French in November and shared his good news:

Your sister and myself profess to be of the number which have shared in the divine Blessing, and, oh, dear Brother, how thankful ought we to be to that God who has preserved us through dangers seen and unseen, has fed and clothed us while we have been rebelling against him and slighting all his counsel and trampling under foot all the privileges which he has bestowed on us. Praised be his name that he has not cut us off in the midst of our sins But has spared us and has in infinite goodness and mercy seen fit to visit us with the outpouring of his holy spirit in our hearts which has caused us to rejoice in him and to resolve that in [the] future we will serve and adore him who died for our sins and arose for our justification. Dear brother, pray for us that our faith fail not, that we may hold out faithful to the end for to such is the promise made. We have to regret that our children remain as yet careless and unconcerned with regard to their future state, but we are encouraged to carry them in the arms of our faith to him who is able and willing to save all who come to him trusting in his merits to redeem, sanctify and save. May we all be faithful in life that we may receive an immortal crown of glory at the last through him who has loved us and died for us. Brother Hiram and Wife seem to be alive to a sense of their duty and quite engaged in religion. Sister Rachel is all animation in the cause. We have meetings twice in one week under the west mountain which are lively and animating to the christian and sinners appear to be alarmed in view of their danger requesting the prayers of God's people in their behalf. . . . I wish you could be here and attend some of our meetings and witness the happiness which pervades the hearts of this people, and the great and happy change which has taken place in society here.⁹⁹

A few months before French's siblings' conversions in Manchester the awakening touched Cambridge, New York, where Mansfield's father Joshua was residing, spurring the elder French to greater evangelical devotion to the point of conducting "some religious exercises in his family" for the first time.¹⁰⁰

Because we lack Mansfield French's letters to Manchester and its dispersed citizens, we do not know his response to all this news. Nevertheless, we can imagine his

⁹⁹ Solomon and Laura Benedict to M. French, Nov. 12, 1831, FFP.

¹⁰⁰ Abraham Bronson to M. French, May 17, 1831, FFP.

elation that his apathetic hometown, the formalist Episcopal parish of his youth, and even his own traditionalist family had finally experienced the renewal of the heart and faith in Christ that he had found five years before at the academy in Bennington. We may also imagine his wonderment at his own indirect role in bringing it about—that his former student Sophronia Miller, whom he had powerfully impacted at Heath, was one of those whose daily prayers prepared the way for Manchester’s awakening.

Yet while evangelical renewal flourished among Episcopalians in Manchester, in Marietta French’s commitment to Episcopalianism loosened. “My mind is unsettled,” he wrote Austa, “I am wavering, I hardly know what to do. I must wait and see what are the leadings of providence. I[t] would, as I have before said repeatedly, be pleasant to me on many accounts to be united with your church, but I cannot change without some cause, and that *duty*.” The reasons for French’s leanings toward the Plan of Union Church are easy to surmise. He had been converted in one Congregationalist setting and taught and conducted revivals in another. His business partner and probably most of his students belonged to Plan of Union churches, and of course his fiancée did. The two educational institutions he admired the most, the female seminaries at Ipswich and Hartford, were Congregationalist. Though revival had broken out in the Episcopal parish in Manchester and college in Gambier, French had left both before experiencing it—his moments of spiritual ecstasy were solely in Congregationalist settings. Moreover, though as a rule Evangelical Episcopalians were pro-revival, through his Congregationalist experiences French probably stood on the extreme revivalist edge of his church, more comfortable than most with so-called “Finneyite” innovations and more hostile than most not only to

“formalism” but also to particular formalists among the clergy. French wrote to a professor at Kenyon to secure an Episcopal minister for Marietta (the lack of which surely also contributed to his denominational discontent), on the condition that he be “not *any* man, but one who is not a high Churchman. I shall not be willing to give any thing towards the support of a man of this stamp.” The evangelical professor rebuked him for his partisan nomenclature. The minister who eventually came to the fledgling Marietta parish was, to French, “a good man, but not so much like [a] Presby[terian] in all respects as I could wish.” French worried that once they married, Austa would

not be so happy under our Episcopalian worship here as you would at almost any other place. My peculiar situation seems to forbid my leaving the Epis. Church here, but were I to leave Marietta I should go to some place where there was no Eps. Ch. or else to Gambier. . . . I am at heart a Presbyterian, and were not my situation very peculiar, I should be one in all things here in Marietta.¹⁰¹

The “peculiar situation” French describes seems to be a function of his position as the Episcopalian co-owner of Marietta’s Plan of Union-dominated institute. Heman Dyer, bemoaning apathy within the Protestant Episcopal Church, sympathized with French’s desire to become a Presbyterian and admitted that he would do so himself if he could be more useful that way. Yet he advised French, “I hope you will remain a member of our church—for no other reason however than this—I believe it will be best for you and for the Inst[itute]. Your friends in the East would feel anxious.”¹⁰² As French and Luther Bingham sought donations wherever they could, it is likely that French’s denominational affiliation opened up a vein of Episcopalian donors that Bingham would never have been

¹⁰¹ M. French to A. Winchell, Jan. 27, 1832, FFP; Alvah Guion to M. French, Jan. 16, 1832, FFP (emphasis original); M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP.

¹⁰² Heman Dyer to M. French, June 19, 1832, FFP.

able to tap by himself. If French jumped to Presbyterianism these dismayed donors may have concluded that the Marietta Institute's solicitations had come to them under false pretenses. Ironically, French's role as a proprietor of the largely Plan of Union school required him to remain Episcopalian.

Though French did not change churches in 1832, the year brought two other changes to his life. French grew more worried about the effect of the colder New England climate on Austa's health. From her arrival in Ipswich Austa battled an ongoing complaint that Mansfield's friends suspected was dyspepsia. In February 1832, about five months after Austa's Ipswich sojourn began, Mansfield implored her to return to Ohio if her condition continued. By June Austa had arrived back in Granville. On August 28, 1832 the couple was married in Austa's parents' home.¹⁰³

The second change was in the Marietta Institute of Education. Before the fall term French and Bingham changed the school's name to the Marietta Collegiate Institute. The rapid growth of the institution and its insatiable demand for funding required another change in ownership and governance. At a meeting of interested parties in November, Bingham and French agreed to sell their proprietorship to the board of trustees of a new institution dubbed the Marietta Collegiate Institute and Western Teachers' Seminary with a charter granted by the state legislature. Officers of the board were elected in December and the sale was completed in January 1833, though it took French some time afterward to tie up all of his business in Marietta. Luther Bingham, invested in the fortunes of the

¹⁰³ M. French to A. Winchell, Feb. 28, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, Mar. 14, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 5, 1832, FFP; A. Winchell to M. French, July 29, 1832, FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 77.

school as the local Congregationalist/Presbyterian minister, stayed on as a member of the new board. Two years later the school's governance was reorganized one more time, receiving from the legislature a new charter that gave the institution the right to grant college degrees, and Marietta College was born.¹⁰⁴

French, however, did not stay with the school after selling his share, despite his great enthusiasm for the enterprise over the two years that it was his, his dreams that it would become "the most important institution of the kind in the west," and his faith that he and Austa might settle in Marietta "for some considerable time, and perhaps for life."¹⁰⁵ He had not given up on getting his college degree from Kenyon and found that, despite his preparedness for examination, he needed to study in residence for more time there to earn his A.B. He had not given up his attraction to the priesthood either.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps it only took divestment for French to reawaken to his vocational first love. Perhaps his eyesight had improved enough to make study seem feasible. Whatever the reasons, French said goodbye to Marietta and took his new wife to Gambier to attempt college study once again.

Granville

In 1833 Mansfield French resumed his studies at Kenyon College, and he appears

¹⁰⁴ Andrews, *History of Marietta*, 194-96; Thomas J. Summers, *History of Marietta* (Marietta, OH: n.p., 1903), 188; Israel Ward Andrews, *Washington County, and the Early Settlement of Ohio; Being the Centennial Historical Address, before the Citizens of Washington County* (Cincinnati: Peter G. Thompson, 1877), 49; M. French to A. French, Oct. 21, 1833, FFP. French's daughter Eliza claimed to have heard that French did not recover \$2,000 of his own money that he put into the building; the veracity of this claim is difficult to evaluate. See E. F. Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," FFP.

¹⁰⁵ M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP; M. French to Silas Winchell, July 8, 1831, FFP.

¹⁰⁶ John Kendrick to M. French, Feb. 14, 1832, FFP; M. French to A. Winchell, June 26, 1832, FFP.

to have taught in the school's Preparatory Department at the same time like Heman Dyer had done. In January 1834 the Frenches' first child, a daughter, Eliza Minerva, was born. But Mansfield's college career was interrupted again. In the fall of 1833 he was already complaining of renewed eye trouble that threatened to make study by candlelight through the winter impossible. He soldiered on with the help of Austa, who read to him when he could not read himself, but in 1834, for the third and last time, he gave up his studies and his hopes for ordained ministry. This final abandonment is particularly interesting because it came entirely at French's volition. Bishop Charles Pettit McIlvaine, who succeeded Philander Chase after the latter's stormy exit from the college and the Diocese of Ohio, saw merit in French and wanted him to stay. "I will ordain you if you will remain here the requisite time, one year more," McIlvaine told French. "I think you can still fill some place." But French despondently refused. "I can never be half a minister," he replied. "I cannot study, and must give it up." In the end, then, it was not his eye trouble or the rules of the Protestant Episcopal Church that kept French out of the ministry. It was rather his own pride manifested in fear, perhaps of not being adequate to the task or of appearing inferior to other ministers or of a career confined to humble assignments. So rather than remain in Gambier teaching preparatory students while awaiting a degree and a ministry post, French relocated his family to Austa's hometown of Granville, where they remained until 1841.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 77; M. French to A. French, Oct. 21, 1833, FFP; "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 14, no. 4: 98. While traveling in June 1834 Mansfield wrote to Austa in Granville; the couple seems to have removed from Gambier to Granville by that time. Their daughter Eliza later claimed that they lived briefly in a log cabin near Mansfield's brother-in-law and sister Solomon and Laura Benedict in Hopewell, Ohio before settling in Granville. However, the Benedicts had not yet moved to Ohio in the summer of 1834. See M. French to A. French, June 6, 1834, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 16, 1834, FFP.

French's activities in Granville are somewhat obscure, but unsurprisingly they seem mostly to have been tied to education. According to Sherlock Anson Bronson, an Episcopal clergyman who moved to the town in 1837, at that time the village's population numbered only eight hundred with about two thousand in the whole township, yet the community boasted four institutions of higher learning—Granville College (Baptist, later renamed Denison University), Granville Female Academy (Plan of Union), Granville Male Academy (Plan of Union), and Granville Female Seminary (originally Baptist). In Bronson's words, "the main business of the town was education."¹⁰⁸

The Granville Female Academy had begun in 1827 and in 1834 moved into its first independent building. The academy was presided over by two young women who had studied under Mary Lyon at both Ipswich and her new enterprise at Mt. Holyoke, Massachusetts, and they built the school on Lyon's model. The academy thrived, receiving its charter from the legislature in 1836 and tripling in enrollment between 1835 and 1837. That year Mansfield French proposed an ambitious plan to equip the academy for further expansion: a single building to house the entire operation, not only classrooms but fifty double bedrooms plus living facilities. The building's construction was estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars, but the trustees approved it. French became one of the agents or perhaps the sole agent—the nineteenth-century term for "fundraiser"—to solicit donations for the project. He succeeded: with about half the funds coming from local donors and half coming from benefactors in the East, the massive, four-story structure, the largest frame building in Ohio at that time, rose in 1838,

¹⁰⁸ Bushnell, *History of Granville*, 227.

despite the hard times of the Panic of 1837.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, what the Frenches were doing before this building project is a mystery. In 1834 Mansfield traveled to liquidate his assets in Manchester to scrape together enough money to “meet my payments” (for what is unknown), did business on behalf of a certain “Alvan” in Watertown, New York, and checked on a marble shipment from Troy, New York on behalf of a Granville stonemason.¹¹⁰ Yet neither Mansfield’s nor Austa’s name can be confidently tied to the Granville Female Academy aside from its 1837 building initiative.¹¹¹

If French really was “at heart a Presbyterian,” as he told Austa in 1832, his move to Granville gave him his chance to prove it. He was released from whatever constraints he had been under as the co-proprietor of the Marietta Institute of Education, he had surrendered his path to the Episcopal ministry and had left Kenyon College for good, he was living in the town of the church his wife had grown up in where his father-in-law was an elder, and the Episcopal parish in the village was small, weak, and without a settled

¹⁰⁹ Utter, *Granville*, 153-56. For the ubiquitous activity of “agents” of Western schools soliciting the philanthropy of Eastern benefactors, see Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 9-10.

¹¹⁰ M. French to A. French, June 6, 1834, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 16, 1834, FFP.

¹¹¹ Family historian Mansfield Joseph French conflates the Frenches’ activities pertaining to Granville Female Academy with those of Granville Female Seminary. He also claims that in 1837 Austa went to Mt. Holyoke to get more school administration tutelage from Mary Lyon for the Female Academy, but this trip is highly unlikely for several reasons. First, the Granville Female Academy’s principals had received training directly from Lyon on this very subject. Second, Mansfield was traveling at the same time to get money for its building. Third, the Frenches had a three-year-old daughter and a one-year-old, Sarah True, whom Austa probably would not have left. As it happened, Sarah died under Austa’s care in Granville on September 16 while Mansfield was raising money in Massachusetts. M. Joseph French probably became confused about a trip that Austa French took to Mt. Holyoke in 1854, after Lyon’s death, just before she and daughter Eliza took up teaching at Xenia Female Seminary under Mansfield’s supervision after ten years of being out of the female education business. See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 77; M. French to A. French, Sept. 29, 1837, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 21, 1854, FFP, see pp. 182-83 below.

minister.¹¹² Yet despite all of this, French remained an Episcopalian. Perhaps the Anglican/Episcopalian heritage of generations of Frenches was ultimately too precious for him to depart from at this point in his life. Whatever his reasons, his choice paid off. In 1836 St. Luke's Episcopal Parish in Granville received its first regular pastor, the aforementioned Sherlock Anson Bronson, who ministered in Granville and another nearby community as a yoked parish. Bronson was a committed, pro-revival evangelical with whom French had somehow become acquainted by 1831, and it probably gratified French greatly to have a minister that shared his views and passions.¹¹³ That mindset extended to ecumenical friendliness with evangelicals of other denominations, such as the Congregationalists/Presbyterians and the Methodists who allowed the small Episcopal parish to use their buildings for worship. From 1837 Bronson devoted all his ministerial energy to St. Luke's and the parish began to flourish. French was one of the several who, in Bronson's words, "deserved mention as more or less interested in the support of the Episcopal Church," serving on the church's building committee and securing its architect.¹¹⁴

The chief result for French remaining Episcopalian, however, was an opportunity to get back into administering and teaching in an academy once more. Local Baptists, chiefly with the financial backing of Granville resident Charles Sawyer, launched their own female school, the Granville Female Seminary, in 1832. After initial growth the

¹¹² That there was an Episcopal parish at all was something of a minor miracle. It was founded out of a complex, four-way fracture of Granville's Congregational church in 1827 and kept going after the other three factions reunited. See Bushnell, *History of Granville*, 130.

¹¹³ Sherlock Anson Bronson to M. French, June 29, 1831, FFP.

¹¹⁴ Bushnell, *History of Granville*, 226, 228; Utter, *Granville*, 119-20; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 78.

school found itself in a precarious financial condition. Though accounts are muddled and conflicting, it appears that by 1838 Sawyer was forced to sell his interest in the school at a severe loss; perhaps his personal fortunes took a hard hit in the Panic. His loss became the gain of the newly prosperous Episcopal church in town, which formed a board of trustees with the means to buy the seminary from Sawyer, having among its own the perfect man to run the enterprise, Mansfield French. By 1841 the revitalized seminary and its boarding house were filled to capacity with students.¹¹⁵

French's years in Granville were relatively quiet both as to surviving documentary evidence and as to his legacy. However, Granville itself was not quiet during his residency, and the turmoil that rocked the community may have had a lasting impact on him.

The denizens of Granville in the 1830s were solidly antislavery, but like many who wanted to see slavery eliminated from the United States, most of Granville's citizens favored a gradual process of emancipation with freed slaves being sent out of the country to new colonies in Africa.¹¹⁶ In 1834 the first abolitionist lecturer visited Granville and agitated the town. The following year abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld visited Granville, and despite official unwelcome (and a thrown egg on his face) he gave a lecture that captured the attention of many. Since this, egg and all, was a better reception than Weld often experienced, later that year when he organized the first statewide abolitionist convention he appointed it to be held at Granville on April 27-28, 1836.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Bushnell, *History of Granville*, 245-46; Utter, *Granville*, 157-58; M. French to A. French, June 23, 1838, FFP; M. French to John Mills, Mar. 16, 1841, John Mills Collection, Marietta College, Marietta, OH. Whether French put his own money into the institution is unknown.

¹¹⁶ For the colonization movement nationwide see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 298-304.

Granville officialdom refused the convention use of its public building and warned the abolitionists not to come, promising not to protect them, but delegates came anyway, meeting in a barn outside of town. A substantial delegation came from Oberlin College, including its president, Asa Mahan. Ten Granville men served as delegates, and others from the town attended also, most notably the two teacher-principals of Granville Female Academy and thirty to forty of their students.

Meanwhile, at the summons of some hostile residents, a mob composed of residents of neighboring communities assembled in the town. Though their hosts got cold feet, the invitees got lubricated with a barrel of whiskey and awaited the convention's adjournment. The abolitionists, armed with makeshift clubs and marching in a phalanx with the women in the center, tried to make their way back through town amid a shower of eggs. When one belligerent shoved a Granville College student and the woman he was escorting into a muddy ditch, the student sprang up and dropped his assailant with one punch. The fight was on. The ensuing mayhem was unlike anything the pious Yankee town had ever seen.¹¹⁷

The effect of the "Great Riot" on the people of Granville was profound. As Granville historian William Thomas Utter described,

Granville abolitionists gained strength as a result of the riot, largely through the conversion of colonizationists. Citizens who had been neutral felt that the village had been disgraced and were critical of officials for abdicating in the face of the rioters. Colonizationists were charged with having abetted the village fathers. While many villagers approved the effort to prevent the holding of the

¹¹⁷ Utter, *Granville*, 166-81. For the upsurge of mob violence in the mid-1830s and its relationship to Jacksonian democracy, see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 487-97; for special focus on anti-abolitionist violence, see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed., Eric Foner, consulting ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 65-74.

convention, few would have argued that the abolitionists “got what they deserved” because they had disregarded the warning. . . .

The temper of the town changed in the years immediately after the riot of 1836. Abolitionists were not hindered when they asked for the use of public buildings; in fact in 1838 the third annual meeting of the state society was held in Granville and the Congregational Church was opened for their sessions.¹¹⁸

The tipping point in the sentiments of the town came when Jacob Little, the highly respected pastor of the Congregational church, went public with his views in 1837. Little despised slavery, but he disapproved of the Oberlin group as hotheads. He had worked hard and successfully to reconcile the factions of the church that had split apart in 1827 and had exerted an enormous influence toward the evangelization of the village and improvement of its moral habits, making it an essentially neo-Puritan community. Little saw abolitionism as a distraction from the spirituality that ought to be the town’s focus, but when the community’s polarization after the riot increasingly excluded a moderate stance and his silence was construed as support for slavery, Little reluctantly came out in support of abolitionism. From that moment, the prevailing opinion in Granville shifted to abolitionism of the order-friendly, evangelical sort associated with Arthur and Lewis Tappan (in contrast to the revolutionary, liberal abolitionism of William Lloyd Garrison).¹¹⁹

It is reasonable to assume that Mansfield French already opposed slavery when Weld and company came to town in 1836. He was a native of Vermont, perhaps the most

¹¹⁸ Utter, *Granville*, 182-83.

¹¹⁹ Utter, *Granville*, 125-36, 187-89. For the two factions that developed among white antebellum abolitionists see Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 736-41; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 88-96. A more analytical and unconventional treatment is found in Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3-18. For the evangelical and antislavery zeal of the Tappan brothers, see Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 63-71.

antislavery state in the nation, especially in its western portion¹²⁰; he was steeped in the New Divinity worldview that in its most avant-garde form animated Oberlin; and he was (at least soon afterward) associated with the Female Academy whose teachers and students allied themselves with Ohio's abolitionists. He also shared the character traits of the emerging leaders of the abolitionist movement like Weld:

A strong sense of their individuality, a deadly earnestness about moral issues, confidence in their ability to master themselves and to improve the world—these were the qualities which so often marked leading abolitionists in their early years. Above all, these reformers believed in their own superiority and fully expected to become leaders.¹²¹

French was not one of Granville's delegates to the abolitionist convention, and we do not know if he attended it or even if he was in town when the riot occurred. However, as Granville's opinion surged toward abolitionism in the convention's aftermath, it is also reasonable to assume that if French had not already moved from a generic antislavery posture to immediate emancipation, he did so then.

Relocation to Circleville

The Frenches' Granville days came to end in 1841 when the couple was invited by leaders of Chillicothe, Ohio to start a female seminary in their town. While Mansfield and Austa, their seven-year-old daughter Eliza, and their three-year-old son Winchell Mansfield were traveling down the Ohio and Erie Canal, their packet boat stopped at Circleville. In 1837, Circleville—so named because its early buildings sat in the middle of a circular prehistoric mound—was a tiny community in a county without a turnpike.

¹²⁰ Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 134-37.

¹²¹ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 41.

Circleville's position on the canal, however, stimulated a flurry of growth and construction in the few years prior to the Frenches' stopover. As daughter Eliza recalled, when the leaders of the rapidly growing town learned of the Frenches' errand to Chillicothe they prevailed upon the couple to open up their seminary in Circleville instead and promised extensive support. French took the villagers up on their offer and settled there, ironically taking over a saloon for the school's first building. In 1841-42 he, Austa, and a principal for the seminary's preparatory department taught seventy-five students the standard academic subjects that they had studied themselves in Vermont, Marietta, and Ipswich, plus calisthenics, Bible study, singing, and piano and guitar. The next academic year saw Austa's retirement and a new and larger faculty, and the school grew modestly to eighty-seven students despite local economic doldrums.¹²²

When Mansfield and Austa's next child, Mansfield Joshua, was born in Circleville on September 16, 1843, perhaps the elder Mansfield paused to reflect on where he had come since 1830. He had journeyed to Ohio to be prepared for the priesthood, to build the Protestant Episcopal Church in that state, to fan the flames of revival, and to enlighten the ignorant and benighted settlers of the West. In the thirteen years following he did not earn a college degree, he remained a layman, and he did not conduct another revival with the power of the one in Heath, Massachusetts. However, he did help to build the Episcopal Church in a few Ohio communities, he led the development of four higher education institutions (mostly for women), and he had gotten a wife and three surviving children.

¹²² David Knowlton Webb, ed., *Circleville Reminiscences: A Description of Circleville, Ohio (1825-1840); Also an Account of the 115-Year-Old Sister of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry* (Chillicothe, OH: D. K. Webb, 1944), 5-26; E. F. Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," FFP; "Circleville Female Seminary, 1842," FFP; "Catalogue of the Circleville Female Seminary, 1843," FFP.

He had stayed loyal to the Protestant Episcopal Church while getting considerable practice at managing female seminaries, and he had reason to believe that he had found his niche. Nevertheless, he could not shake the feeling that he was not doing what he ought to be doing, and his unease was becoming too great to ignore.¹²³

¹²³ "The Christian's Privilege," *BH* 13, no. 8 (August 1862): 261.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODIST PREACHER-PUBLISHER (1843-61)

We advocate not merely a seventh-day or a cloistered Holiness—but a working, aggressive Holiness, that enters the great battle-field of life, to do valiantly for righteousness, justice, humanity, God; in short, to get this erratic, babbling world wheeled into her moral orbit once more.

—*Beauty of Holiness, in Heart and Life* (1859)

French's Revolution

On July 24, 1845, Mansfield French wrote a letter to his wife Austa at home in Circleville from a Methodist camp meeting in Worthington, Ohio. French's genealogist-grandson, Mansfield Joseph French, considered it remarkable enough to reproduce almost the entire text in his history of the French family.¹ The same course is followed here:

My dear wife,

I am just now (Thursday morning) about to start for Delaware [Ohio], & I thought I must give you some acc[oun]t of God's goodness and his wonderful works. The Lord owned & blessed in a signal manner our poor labors at the 4 days meeting. We had to meet in a barn, occupying the floor, stable & scaffolding, and the ground outside some of the time.

The power of the Lord was felt. On Sunday P.M. I preached the "Old Sermon" in the evening. One mourner was converted & one believer (a Methodist) obtained the witness of a clean heart, Br. Duff.

The old man, the owner of the barn, turned us all out, & we had to seek another. This greatly distressed his three pious sons. They felt much for him—an old man upwards of sixty. I proposed to them to lay the matter before the Lord. We all did so. They three, and brother P. and I, vowed before God, we would neither eat nor drink till he was converted. This was Monday afternoon. One of the sons then went to him, and said "Father, I have such a burden on my mind I can hardly live," & then told him the vow. The old man was deeply affected. At 11 o'clock at night we returned & had family worship. Br. P. prayed. I said, Br. Barber, will you

¹ Mansfield Joseph French, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1940), 78-79.

pray. No, said he very abruptly. I called on his youngest son to pray. Then I called on the father. A stern no, was the reply. God enabled me mightily to call on his name. Will you not pray now, said I. No was his answer. Now what do you [think] the Devil said about our vow? Br. P. and [I] went to his barn & spent all night in prayer. In the morning we went into the house. He said why did you go to the barn, apparently displeased. I said to pray for your soul. He burst into tears and turned away. The breakfast was soon ready. We left him to eat alone, to eat, [illegible] to try. 'Twas only to try. He was all at once very sick, took a dose of salts. Poor man, he mistook his disease. He wanted a little submission and faith. Such a forenoon I never witnessed. All of us were tired, tempted, passed into a horror of great darkness [Genesis 15:12]. Still the devil could induce none of us to break our vow. At 2 o'clock the old man left for the woods. We all about 3 went to prayer by ourselves. We all got the victory. The struggle was over. God s[ai]d to me when in prayer, "I have seen his ways & will heal him. I will lead him also and restore comfort to him & to his mourners." Isaiah 57[:18]. Bless the Lord I believed it, had no more doubts. I went to the house happy like the centurion [Matthew 8:5-13]. We all felt happy & could pray no more. We waited, he came not. He was in the woods. 'Twas getting late, the horn was blown. He came not. Dusk came, Br. P & I went into the woods to search, could find nothing, returned, 'twas 8 o'clock. He came not. He must have wandered a great distance in the woods, how far we do not know. He went north into the woods, we looked [from the?] south. He was coming. He came into the porch. I met him. How do you do, said I. "I am a poor miserable, sinful wretch," said he. "There is no mercy for me." He could say no more. He went in, fell into his wife[']s arms. Such a time. We applied the promises, & Glory to God in 15 m[inu]t[e]s he was able to say, I believe! The burden flew, Christ became his Savior! Oh bless the Lord for his mercy and faithfulness. That night we saw 4 souls converted. How we all felt that night, you must imagine. The fatted calf was killed [Luke 15:23-24]. Oh Glory, glory be to God. I was here, preached the Old Sermon to quite a large congregation last night. Had great liberty. This morning, just was to start for D[elaware] free of expense. Shall not probably be home before Monday or Tuesday. Oh glory, my soul is full. Pray for me. The Lord is our shepherd—we shall not want [Psalm 23:1]. I write in great hurry. Much love to all. The Lord bless & keep you. Amen.

Yours truly,
Mansfield

Try & spell it out if you can. Don't tell about the old man to everyone. All may not believe. Come, come to the camp meeting, they say.

French's letter illustrates four major changes that occurred in his life in a period of

less than two years. The first was a denominational change from the Protestant Episcopal Church to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The previous year, in August 1844, French wrote that he planned to attend the upcoming Ohio Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (which, as a greenhorn unused to Methodist terminology, he called its “Session”) at Marietta the following month. After the camp meeting described in this July 1845 letter, French was to make his way to Delaware, Ohio coincident with a meeting of the Board of Trustees of Ohio Wesleyan University, the Methodist college associated with the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences.² Whether or not French had business with the trustees or had some other errand in Delaware is unknown. What is known that after he returned home he was to take another trip, this time to Marion, Ohio, because tied to French’s denominational change was an occupational change. On July 7, the Quarterly Meeting of the Mount Vernon District had voted to recommend that the North Ohio Conference, meeting at Marion on August 13, appoint French as a traveling preacher on trial to the Martinsburg Circuit.³

Previously, in late 1843, French joined the Methodists and very quickly was appointed to a position of responsibility in the highly organized Methodist leadership structure. At first he may have been a class leader with the task of supervising the spiritual condition and facilitating the weekly religious meetings of a group of twelve to thirty believers. He may also have been an exhorter, the lowest grade of Methodist

² M. French to John Mills, Aug. 11, 1844, John Mills Collection, Marietta College, Marietta, OH; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1839-1845* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 3:515; *Western Christian Advocate* (July 11, 1845): 51.

³ Recommendations, Licenses, Records and Letters with Reports and Clippings Relating to Ministers in the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1837-1895, Archives of Ohio United Methodism, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH.

preacher. In either case, it was not long before French was appointed a local preacher—an unpaid, bivocational minister who conducted and preached at Sunday worship exercises most weeks while the superior traveling preacher ministered at another point on the Circleville Circuit. Camp meetings drew traveling preachers, local preachers like French, and exhorters from around the district to preach the gospel to the masses. French’s role of preaching in the evenings at the Worthington camp meeting indicates that his fellow preachers held him in considerable esteem, since these were prime times in a camp meeting’s schedule. His leadership is also evident in the conversion process of “Brother Barber,” most likely a “respectable worldling” who allowed the Methodists to use his farmland for their camp meetings. It was natural that a local preacher of French’s caliber would be recommended by the Quarterly Meeting, which consisted of all preachers of all ranks in a district, to be elevated to the traveling connection, though it is a mystery why he was recommended by the Quarterly Meeting of a district other than his own in an entirely different conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Whatever the reason, French left the principalship of the Circleville Female Seminary behind forever in favor of full-time dedication to preaching, Methodist-style.⁴

Associated with French’s occupational change was a third shift, a financial change, to which he alluded in his letter to Austa with the words of the Twenty-Third Psalm, “The Lord is our shepherd—we shall not want.” The years 1841-43 showed a stable enrollment at the seminary, and French prospered enough to provide his family

⁴ Matthew Simpson, *A Hundred Years of Methodism* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1876), 211-14; *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1844), 81-82; Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion’s Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 88-89.

with a comfortable, middle-class life that furnished Austa with copious leisure time.⁵ Yet this had changed, to which many more of his letters to Austa over many more years bear witness. Ministers in some Protestant denominations had long been considered professionals and had the education to back that status up. By the time of French's change of denomination and occupation, populist preachers (including Methodists) were rising to the level of the professionals, yet among all denominations ministers' salaries usually fell far short of their social standing. On average, especially outside of large cities, ministerial compensation in that era approximated the income of the working class, a third to half of what sustained a comfortable, middle-class lifestyle, although clergy were sometimes assisted by the use of a parsonage. Moreover, Methodist clergymen's compensation tended to fall below the ministerial average across denominations. In sum, French's new vocation cost him dearly.⁶

Lastly, French underwent an emotional-spiritual change. Religious emotion was certainly nothing new to him, of course, as his days as a teacher at Heath amply testify,⁷ although that zeal had cooled with age. At this time in his life, however, French's spiritual temperature and the intensity of his feelings soared again, and for the first time he claimed to hear the voice of God. The agony and ecstasy of this 1845 camp meeting became regular features of his life for many years. Similarly, French's use in the letter of the ejaculation of praise *Glory* hints at a new religious vocabulary suited to a reframed

⁵ See p. 113; "The Christian's Privilege," *Beauty and Power of Holiness, in Heart and Life* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 99.

⁶ E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 114-31.

⁷ See pp. 43-49.

spirituality that French expressed in new ways in new congregational settings. Notably, the vocabulary drew heavily on biblical allusions that French laced through his discourse. Mansfield French was not alone: Austa French was transformed also. Her early letters display a sensitive personality, and from the 1850s on her writings were heavily steeped in Victorian sentimentalism. Yet these factors do not fully explain the high pitch of emotional expression and emotionally driven judgment that Austa exhibited after 1844, miles away in tenor from the sober letters of her courtship with Mansfield.

So what happened to Mansfield French? As the offspring of generations of Anglicans and as a lifelong Episcopalian, long considering but never acting on a move to Presbyterianism, what impelled him to become a Methodist, a significantly greater leap? Why did he take the financial risk associated with leaving his seminary for full-time ministry? What fired his spiritual zeal and drew from him shouts of praise? The answer is “the witness of a clean heart” claimed in French’s letter by Brother Duff. The change wrought in Mansfield and Austa French, as they saw it, had everything to do with perfection in love, entire sanctification. The Frenches were transformed by holiness.⁸

Holiness from Wesley to Palmer

The doctrine of holiness (also known as Christian perfection, entire sanctification, perfect love, and a clean heart) promulgated by John Wesley and eighteenth-century Methodists and by their nineteenth-century heirs may seem arcane to twenty-first-century students, even Christians, especially non-Wesleyans. This is not least because of the

⁸ For the presence or absence of a capital “H” in “Holiness”/“holiness,” see p. viii n. 1.

potential for paradox and qualification within the doctrine itself, but it is also because of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Methodists' moves to reinterpret, alter, or distance themselves from older teaching on the subject, which makes it appear to be even more of a historical-theological curiosity.⁹ However, the doctrine was a lifelong passion of the chief founder of Methodism, and it swelled to its most widespread influence during and just after the lifetime of Mansfield French, not just among Wesleyans but among American and European evangelicals across denominations. In other words, holiness/perfection/higher life was anything but esoteric. It was a major religious driver of the mid-nineteenth century and likewise a major driver of the Frenches.¹⁰ Therefore, an extended survey of the development of the theology of holiness from John Wesley to Mansfield French's time is required in order to understand what changed Mansfield and Austa French as they saw it and what they then devoted their lives to proclaim.

The spiritual and religious journey of John Wesley, Methodism's eighteenth-century senior founder with his younger brother Charles, might be considered a singular outworking of his obsessive thirst for holiness—"without which no man shall see the Lord"—for himself and then for everyone else.¹¹ Before he began self-consciously articulating teaching about Christian perfection in the present life, John Wesley had imbibed the concept by reading widely and deeply in authors of the Christian mystical

⁹ See pp. 576-78.

¹⁰ Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 103-47; Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Evangelicalism 1, Donald W. Dayton and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

¹¹ Quoting Hebrews 12:14, a favorite Bible verse among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodists. Cf. the account of an early period of Wesley's life in Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), NOOK e-book, 31-54.

tradition from the Church Fathers through medieval writers to his own day, culminating in the works of Anglicans Jeremy Taylor and William Law.¹² When Wesley began teaching perfection himself, his doctrine could be summarized in seven axioms enumerated by historian R. Newton Flew as follows.

First, Wesley taught that aiming for perfection is necessary for a Christian believer, because there is no such thing as a halfway Christian. A believer who does not yearn to be perfected is not a true believer. Second, “[t]his perfection is love,” unalloyed love for God and neighbor. Third, “[l]ove includes the keeping of all [God’s] commandments” revealed in the Bible. These three components of Wesley’s teaching, except perhaps the first, are not terribly controversial within Christian theology, especially evangelical theology. Matters become more interesting at Flew’s fourth summary point, that “[p]erfection is freedom from sin.” In other words, although Wesley’s statements through his lifetime are somewhat self-contradictory, he appears to have believed that a spiritually reborn believer in his or her present existence can become so consumed by love from and to God that he or she may avoid ever voluntarily or consciously transgressing God’s law again. This does not mean that the capacity to sin has been entirely removed from the believer, only that it has been suppressed or displaced—in fact, a perfected believer may choose to fall away from that grace. This fourth point is also significantly qualified by the fifth axiom that there is a “distinction between voluntary and involuntary transgressions.” Wesley contradicted himself on this question even more, yet what became the official stance of Methodism during Wesley’s lifetime

¹² R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 314-15.

was that a believer who had been perfected was still capable of making a mistake, including having a mistaken opinion that could lead to an erring practice. Such a mistake is a violation of God's perfect law, and therefore it is a sin requiring atonement by the sacrifice of Christ for forgiveness. Nevertheless, despite mistakes caused by ignorance, all of the *inclinations* of the perfected Christian's heart—all of his or her intentions—are drawn from and aim toward love of God and neighbor.¹³

The final two points of Wesley's teaching on perfection are especially important for understanding the continuity and discontinuity between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Methodism. The sixth axiom is that "[t]he reception of the experience is instantaneous." Although God's work to sanctify a believer is often gradual, there is nevertheless an indivisible point at which a person tips from being not quite perfected to perfected. This idea, inherent in Wesleyan doctrine from the beginning, received pronounced emphasis in the nineteenth century. Seventh and finally, assurance of perfection is achieved through four perceptions within and about oneself: (a) complete, convicted awareness of one's "inbred sin" that is much greater than the awareness experienced as part of the conversion process; (b) gradual elimination of sinful thoughts and deeds from one's life; (c) perception that sinful desires have been entirely replaced by love and constant, attentive communication with God; and (d) the "testimony of the Spirit" within the believer that entire sanctification has taken place.¹⁴

Wesley held that the Holy Spirit's witness to sanctified perfection was crucial,

¹³ Flew, *Idea of Perfection*, 324-27.

¹⁴ Flew, *Idea of Perfection*, 327-28.

because those who claim perfection but then demonstrate by bad conduct that they have not actually been perfected probably made their claim before they received the Spirit's testimony. The witness of the Spirit was also key because it corresponded to a critical aspect of the theology and experience of conversion among many eighteenth-century evangelicals, John Wesley prominently among them. The evangelical conversion process began with "acute distress" over one's low and sinful spiritual state, expressed in anxious self-examination and longing prayers. Then the person experienced an internal change that he or she perceived came from outside the self—a gift directly from God, although the testimony of another person who had already received the gift was usually instrumental to receiving it. The change involved an unprecedented illumination pertaining to the person of Jesus Christ that was both thoroughly cognitive and thoroughly affective. The new believer became conscious of personal, direct connection to a present God and conscious of a new capability, entirely drawn from God, to overcome temptation to evil in thought and deed, which the person validated by new ethical behavior. This consciousness was the "testimony of the Spirit." In their individual spiritual journeys, John and Charles Wesley and other eighteenth-century evangelicals assented to evangelical doctrine and sought Christ for salvation for some time before being so bold as to claim actually having been converted. They made the claim only after having a profound experience in which the Spirit of God directly communicated to their souls that they had received new spiritual birth.¹⁵

Wesley and the Methodists of his connection conceived of a believer's perfection

¹⁵ Flew, *Idea of Perfection*, 316-20. Cf. Collins, *John Wesley*, 79-89; John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 43-48.

as parallel to what they had experienced in conversion. Like conversion, the perfection process also involved a period of anxious longing, this time not for mere victory over temptation but for the eradication of any inward appetite for sin at all and for uninterrupted communion with God. Like conversion, perfection also was a gift of God given entirely by his grace and received entirely through faith, and it also came instantaneously at the conclusion of however long and anguished a preparation. Yet there was a critical difference in how the experiences of conversion and of perfection were handled within the community of believers. When seekers finally received the witness of the Spirit that they had been converted, they were quick to testify to it—for example, Charles Wesley wrote thousands of hymns proclaiming it. This was critical to the spread of the evangelical movement, because one person's conversion was almost always stimulated by someone else's testimony to having been converted. Yet by sharp contrast, early Methodists were extremely reticent to testify to being perfected even if they believed themselves to have received the gift. For example, John Wesley was eager to collect testimonies of Methodists who had been entirely sanctified, yet notoriously he never unambiguously claimed the blessing himself.¹⁶

This created an increasingly uneasy tension as Methodism developed after John Wesley's death. On the one hand, Methodists continued to take seriously Wesley's contention that Christian perfection was "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists," and that "for the sake of propagating this chiefly He

¹⁶ Flew, *Idea of Perfection*, 320-23; Collins, *John Wesley*, 193-95, 246.

appeared to have raised us up.”¹⁷ In fact, Methodists everywhere in the United States in the 1830s and ’40s maintained that Christians could be perfected in love with remarkable consistency with what John Wesley had taught the previous century. Admittedly, there had been some subtle developments over the years. John Fletcher, Wesley’s chosen successor, identified entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit recounted in the Book of Acts. Adam Clarke took the next logical step by associating the baptism of holiness with spiritual power. Timothy Merritt added “the idea of making a covenant with God as a step toward obtaining sanctification.” Yet despite these small (though ultimately significant) modifications, Methodist teaching on the subject remained true to John Wesley’s and was held without controversy within the church.¹⁸

At the same time, however, there was mounting concern within Methodism that “the grand depositum” of holiness was on its way to being lost. Circuit riders on the American frontier had laid much heavier emphasis on conversion than on perfection because those hard-riding, overworked preachers had been dealing with a mostly unevangelized population and because the vast distances they had to travel gave them comparatively little time to invest in raising believers to maturity and pressing them toward perfection. There was also the troubling matter that had lingered since Wesley’s time: the paucity of testimonies to receiving the gift of sanctification. With few Methodists claiming perfection, diminishing numbers hoped for it as a blessing

¹⁷ John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 8 (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 238, quoted in Collins, *John Wesley*, 247.

¹⁸ Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), xi-xiii, 122-24; Harold E. Raser, *Phoebe Palmer: Her Life and Thought*, *Studies in Women and Religion* 22 (Lewistown, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987), 230-54.

imminently to be realized despite their belief in its theoretical possibility. Faced with the budding crisis of the functional loss of the signature doctrine of entire sanctification within their church, voices like Timothy Merritt's began advocating for its importance in the 1820s. In 1832 the bishops of the church issued a clarion call to Methodists to seek the gift of holiness with renewed vigor, and New York's *Christian Advocate*, the nation's most influential Methodist newspaper, urged members to hold special meetings devoted to that aim.¹⁹

Meanwhile, currents within American Christianity and society made the moment ripe for renewed emphasis on perfection. These currents included a yearning for oneness with the divine; a pragmatic craving for a power that could transform individuals, the nation, and the world and free them from all that was inferior that had come before; and the predominant belief among evangelicals that Christ would return after a millennium of qualified perfection had been established on earth by his church. As historian Melvin Easterday Dieter put it, "The inherent optimism in [the] American dream was readily assimilated with the optimism of perfectionism in the holiness movement; the two were to be regular traveling companions throughout the nineteenth century—each undoubtedly helping the other along the way." Even evangelicals from non-Wesleyan backgrounds—notably Charles Grandison Finney—were considering and soon to profess versions of perfectionism, and the doctrine shared significant points of contact with elements of contemporary non-evangelical thought.²⁰

¹⁹ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 115-16; Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 37.

²⁰ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 103-13, 141-47; p. 58 above; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 4-6, 21-25.

Yet a crucial obstacle remained: Methodists were waiting for the second blessing in a religious milieu that had grown unaccustomed to waiting. Eighteenth-century evangelicals like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards had inherited a religious mindset that inculcated a heavy dose of doubt about the sincerity of one's faith and devotion and about one's status before a righteous God. Although Wesley, Edwards, and their contemporary evangelicals continued to affirm the validity of religious self-doubt, they also added to it a call to immediate repentance, an urgent summons to exercise saving faith *now*. Wesley's "testimony of the Spirit" (and analogous language among other evangelicals) was the resolution of the paradox; it transcended the uncertainty of human beings who, of themselves, could not and should not do otherwise but doubt their salvation, because it gave them assurance directly from God that their response to the preacher's call to receive Christ as their own was genuine and accepted by God. This paradoxical mindset still existed among some evangelicals circa 1830, as evinced by French's students at Heath.²¹ Yet it was passing away in a new era that disdained paradox.

Eighteenth-century evangelicals like Wesley had been influenced by the older epistemology of John Locke, who taught that knowing is, so to speak, feeling, sensing, or experiencing. Therefore, faith to Wesley and his contemporaries was an inner apprehension of an object—namely, God—as with a sixth sense. The faith that God requires for justification (i.e., forgiveness associated with conversion) and sanctification was an experiential faith. As described earlier,²² however, this epistemology had given

²¹ See pp. 42-48.

²² See pp. 37-39.

way in nineteenth-century America to Scottish Common Sense Realism, which asserted that the objects that we think we perceive, we really perceive, and the things that we think we know, we really know—we do not merely know “ideas” about those objects and concepts one step removed from them. Thus evangelicals had increasing confidence that what they perceived to be faith within themselves was actual faith. If they were conscious of believing that Christ alone was their Savior, then they must really believe it. Assurance of salvation, then, came not from waiting for the inner witness of the Spirit but from opening the Bible, reading the promises offered in it to the believer, taking them at face value, and trusting that they applied to oneself.²³ For example, in the case of Brother Barber, the stubborn sinner in Mansfield French’s letter above, that farmer’s anguish came from believing that “[t]here is no mercy for me.” In response, French “applied the promises” of Scripture, and in a mere fifteen minutes—not days, weeks, or years of agonized seeking—“he was able to say, I believe!” At that moment, French concluded, “[t]he burden flew [and] Christ became his Savior!” French no longer evangelized the way that he did fifteen years before when he prayed for agonized, self-doubting students weeks after they passed through the spring term revival.

Methodism in the 1830s was waiting for someone who would apply the new paradigm of conversion to sanctification and make holiness immediately accessible to everyone who wanted it. The person who made the breakthrough was—unexpectedly yet also fittingly²⁴—a laywoman named Phoebe Palmer, who came to assume great

²³ Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 18-20; Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 274-77.

²⁴ Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 255-56.

importance not only to nineteenth-century Methodism but to Mansfield and Austa French personally.

Phoebe Worrall grew up in a staunch Methodist household in New York City. From childhood she had a persistent problem: she did not possess the subjective, inner witness of the Spirit that the Wesleys had and that Methodists expected every genuine believer to have. Therefore, despite her devotion and agreement with church teaching, she continually questioned whether she was truly saved. According to historian Harold Raser, “The whole of Methodist spirituality seemed to her so subjective and so much dependent upon emotions which somehow eluded her”; as she herself put it, “Not infrequently she felt like weeping because she could not weep.” Young Phoebe longed for the objectivity of Old Testament altar worship in place of the shifting sands of Methodist spirituality. When the Methodist bishops began urging renewed emphasis on the doctrine of entire sanctification in 1832, one local result was intensified promotion of and seeking after holiness at New York’s Allen Street Methodist Episcopal Church, to which Phoebe belonged with her devout husband, physician Walter C. Palmer. The emphasis on holiness in her church only compounded Phoebe Palmer’s problem: as she saw it, she was frustrated in gaining sanctification in part because she had not confirmed her justification, sanctification’s prerequisite.²⁵

Meanwhile, Palmer’s sister Sarah Lankford had much greater success. Lankford experienced sanctification, as she recorded it, on May 21, 1835 at two-thirty in the afternoon. At that time, while praying, she consecrated herself entirely to God, and then

²⁵ Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 34-38.

she took the critical step. Believing that the Bible taught that the person who consecrated herself wholly was thus dead to sin and entirely sanctified, Lankford claimed assurance that she had received the gift even though she had no subjective, mystical, spiritual experience to validate it. She continued in confidence in her sanctification by what would become known as “naked faith” for seven days when suddenly an overwhelming experience came that Lankford termed “the baptism of the Holy Ghost . . . in its glorious fullness.” Lankford told other women about her sanctification, including her sister Phoebe, and she urged them to seize it in the same manner. Palmer did not have exactly the same experience as Lankford, but like her sister Palmer volitionally gave her entire self over to God, believing from Scriptural promises that her offering was “received” and that she was therefore sanctified. Although she felt nothing new within right away, Palmer acted out her faith that she was indeed perfected by praising God for it, and then she suddenly experienced an awesome sensation of transport into heaven itself. She too felt an obligation to enjoin others to access the sanctified life that she had found.²⁶

Lankford moved her meetings for promoting holiness into the home that she shared with the Palmers, and attendance grew rapidly. Soon Phoebe Palmer surpassed her sister in leadership of the budding movement, and thereafter men began attending the meeting as well. Thomas Upham, a mystically minded Congregationalist mental philosopher of a quite different intellectual disposition than Palmer, became the first man under her teaching to testify to receiving the blessing of perfection. In time the leading lights of the Methodist Episcopal Church including bishops and the redoubtable Nathan

²⁶ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 9-25.

Bangs began attending. The legendary “Tuesday Meeting” in the Palmer home came to serve as the rendezvous of the Who’s Who of mid-nineteenth-century Methodism.

Phoebe Palmer started promulgating holiness through writing books and articles in the magazine that Timothy Merritt had started, *The Guide to Christian Perfection* (later renamed *The Guide to Holiness*), which garnered her a wide readership. From there she and husband Walter launched into itinerant tours to call sinners to be saved and believers to be sanctified. Though there was some delicacy around application of the term “preacher” to a woman, Palmer became in fact one of the most popular preachers in American Methodism.²⁷

The Worrall sisters altered the order of sanctification from “seek, experience, claim” to “seek, claim, experience,” and that reformulation allowed others to enter in. A key element of the Worralls’ adaptation was self-consecration, which Palmer explained with a biblical metaphor that became known as her “altar theology.” As described by her biographer Charles Edward White, Palmer

deduced that Christians who entirely consecrate themselves to Christ are presenting their bodies as living sacrifices [cf. Romans 12:1]. Christ himself is the altar on which the offering is made so as long as believers rest themselves entirely on him, their all is on the altar. Because whatever touches the altar is holy [cf. Matthew 23:19], the believers themselves are holy. Thus entire consecration guarantees entire sanctification.

Equally important to consecration is faith in the promise of God. Here Palmer’s teaching commits what White calls a “subtle shift in the object of faith” from God to oneself. For Palmer, to doubt that one is sanctified after one consecrates oneself is to doubt the Bible,

²⁷ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 116-24; White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 27-48. Palmer wrote a startlingly avant-garde biblical argument for female preaching in *The Promise of the Father* (New York: Garland, 1985). French warmly endorsed the book; see “The Seal Broken,” *BH* 10, no. 11 (November 1859): 335-36.

and to doubt the Bible is to doubt God. By this Palmer assumed that it was a simple and straightforward matter to know oneself to be entirely consecrated; it was illegitimate or even impossible for a believer to be convinced of the Bible's teaching on holiness yet unconvinced that he or she had truly placed him- or herself wholly on the altar that is Christ.

If faith in God's promise was genuine, it had to be proven, and the essential means to prove faith was for the sanctified believer to testify to receiving the gift. It was crucial that the consecrated believer confess sanctification to others despite, like Sarah Lankford, not having any confirmatory mystical experience beforehand. To require such an experience from God before testifying that his promise applies to oneself did not exhibit genuine faith, as Wesley believed, but rather no faith. Instead, the believer must testify to perfection despite the lack of evidence, even despite evidence to the contrary, no matter how long it might take before a spiritual experience comes and even if it never comes. Not to testify implied a lack of faith, and lack of faith rendered self-consecration moot in the search for the blessing.

Nevertheless, with the simple steps of consecration, faith, and testimony in place, all believers, not just a special few, could be perfected immediately. Although perfection could be said to be of grace because Christ's atoning death was the only basis by which God could bestow the gift and faith in his atonement was the only way one could receive it, nevertheless access to the gift was entirely within the believer's power, to be claimed without delay. Thus the path to perfection finally came into line with the path to conversion in antebellum evangelicalism, and Phoebe Palmer became the preeminent

holiness revivalist.²⁸

It is ironic that in a Romantic and even sentimental age in which evangelical revivalism was accustomed to running on extreme spiritual experience like fuel, Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection would gain a new lease on life through a reframing that eschewed emotional feeling for "naked faith in a naked Word." It is also ironic, yet appropriate, that Phoebe Palmer was the figure to be most insistent on this replacement since she actually obtained the mystical experience that she had been missing in her own spiritual quest immediately after rejecting the necessity of it. Although Palmer downplayed mystical experience, however, she fervently maintained that sanctification had very real effects in the life of the believer:

The soul through faith having laid upon that altar that sanctifieth the gift experiences *continually* the all-cleansing efficacy of the blood of Jesus; and through this it knows the blessedness of being presented faultless before the throne and . . . gaining new accessions of wisdom, power, and love, with every other grace, daily.

These "new accessions" yielded the sanctified believer several benefits, all of which Palmer herself had experienced personally. First, Palmer taught, the sanctified believer has assurance of being fully accepted by God and that his or her motives for religious action are pure. Second, the sanctified person has the confidence and compulsion to urge others to gain holiness. Third, the sanctified person, having abandoned all that is theirs to God, is free to give all time, ability, and money to God's work.²⁹

The daily increasing effects of holiness on the believer, as Palmer enumerated

²⁸ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 135-40; Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 153-54, 166-77, 258-63.

²⁹ Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 47, 161-63; *The Christian Advocate and Journal* (Oct. 20, 1841): 37, quoted in Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 153-54.

them, tended toward activism, and thus holiness had implications for the wider world in which believers lived. Palmer followed the path that John Fletcher and Adam Clarke had hinted at, that perfect love was the baptism of the Holy Spirit in power as in apostolic days. Unlike them, however, she made the association a central feature of her teaching, arguing that churches were impotent simply because they lacked that baptism. She and her hearers may have gravitated to the linkage of holiness and power with increasing force in the 1850s not only from biblical evidence but also due to a feeling of powerlessness in the face of great forces of change (like industrialization) and of evil (like slavery), which threatened to stop cold the millennial optimism of the 1830s. Palmer preached that “holiness is power” and viewed revivals over which she presided in which many were saved and many were sanctified as places where “the power poured out.” Without that power of holiness, America and the world would not be transformed.³⁰

Eventually Palmer went a step beyond that and strongly implied that without being perfected in holiness, even a *Christian believer* might not be saved. Although John Wesley was adamant that all believers should be pressed to seek the blessing of sanctification assiduously, he also insisted that a believer who was justified but not sanctified was nonetheless a true believer and could have complete confidence in forgiveness of sins by the merits of Christ and an inheritance in heaven. Palmer believed as fervently as Wesley did that without holiness “no man shall see the Lord,” but while Wesley held that every true believer receives this gift of holiness at death although some may receive it earlier in the mortal life, Palmer warned that a believer who had not

³⁰ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 128-29.

received the blessing by the time of his or her death risked remaining separated from God for eternity, unfit to see his face. Moreover, while she and Wesley agreed that a perfected individual could willfully backslide and forfeit the gift, Palmer went further and threatened that damnation might result. Backsliding could occur through a number of behaviors that demonstrate “conformity to the world”: above all fancy dress, also preoccupation with possessions, loving one’s reputation above bearing witness to Christ and holiness, rejecting God’s call to ministry, casual joking, and, very importantly, failing to continue to testify that one has been sanctified. “If you shrink from *any duty*, you will take the offering from off the altar, and then you will *fall* from a state of entire sanctification.” Then she warned, “If you begin to fall, the Lord only knows how low your fall may be.” All told, despite Palmer’s orthodox postulate that holiness was a gift of God’s grace, her preaching placed immense responsibility for sanctification on human attitude and behavior.³¹

To summarize, when Mansfield and Austa French became Methodists in 1844, two versions of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification circulated within Methodism, one flowing in and the other draining away. The older version involved waiting for the supernatural witness of the Spirit in the heart indicating that one had been perfected in love from and to God, which overflowed into love of neighbor. The newer version entailed vocally confessing reception of the gift on the bases of entire self-consecration and faith in biblical promises—Phoebe Palmer’s redefinition of “the witness

³¹ Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 152-53, 179-81, 232; Phoebe Palmer, *Entire Devotion to God: A Present to a Christian Friend* (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1853), 158, quoted in Raser, *Phoebe Palmer*, 181.

of the Spirit,” with or without spiritual experience—which resulted in power to transform the world. The older version incorporated paradox and ambiguity; the newer version rejected both. Although the contrast appears sharp in historical perspective as it has been highlighted here, it must not be overdrawn. Both John Wesley and Phoebe Palmer asserted the availability of a second transformation of grace, subsequent to conversion, that freed the believer from all willful sin. The continuity between Wesley and Palmer was great enough that Palmer believed herself to be teaching exactly what Wesley had a century earlier. Her adherents and Methodists in general believed the same, at least for a time.³²

In 1843-44 the Frenches underwent a radical change encompassing denominational affiliation, vocation, material circumstances, spirituality, and even temperament. The fiery zeal, the passion for the promulgation of holiness, and the no-turning-back pride in Methodism that they exhibited over the following years came from a spiritual encounter that they believed to be perfection in love. Yet they themselves were caught between the old and new versions of the doctrine, a dissonance that they vaguely perceived but could not quite name. The story of how they got started in the Methodist Episcopal Church illustrates nineteenth-century Methodists’ transition from one path to sanctification to the other.

Embracing Perfectionism and Joining Methodism

The Frenches’ shift from Episcopalianism to Methodism had its origin in Austa’s

³² White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 122, 141-44.

spiritual turmoil. The Calvinism in which she was raised as a Congregationalist put very heavy stress on human depravity to the extent of teaching that as long as a person was in the mortal body, even if one was a regenerate Christian, even the very best act that one performed was still tainted by sin in some degree. That the believer could not identify where sin might be in his or her actions or motives made no difference—it was there. Ironically, to confess that one sinned all the time was viewed in her circle not as a mark of perversion but of spiritual maturity. For years this doctrine burdened Austa's mind; she knew that all her sins had been forgiven through her justification at conversion, yet she longed to escape from the continual necessity of sinning even when she made her best effort and to attain the ideal that she was ordered to strive for but admonished that she would never reach.³³

In 1841 or 1842 Austa became gripped by a longing to proclaim the gospel to Nestorian Christians as a foreign missionary, and she was willing to sell everything they had and take the two children they had at that time to the East for the rest of her and Mansfield's lives in obedience to that call. (Importantly, she later considered this to be the moment that she fully consecrated herself to God.) Austa drew on Mansfield's earlier sense of call to Greece³⁴ to plead with him to recommit himself to foreign missions and to see it through, but he refused. At some point between his success in Heath and his latest abandonment of ordained ministry, friends succeeded in persuading him that he would do more good in the long term as a revivalistic school principal than as a missionary. He did

³³ "The Christian's Privilege," *BH* 13, no. 7 (July 1862): 227-29. Austa French described her entire journey with respect to sanctification in a serial called "The Christian's Privilege" published in twenty-six installments in *Beauty of Holiness* from June 1861 through May 1864.

³⁴ See p. 33.

prove to be an instrumental spiritual guide to a number of students who went on to foreign missions themselves, but over time the number of revivals and conversions under his tutelage waned. Education became for French less and less of a ministerial pursuit. He had a gnawing sense that the stable life he led as an educator was not what he was supposed to be doing, but he was not yet disturbed enough to do anything about it. Yet Austa's spiritual restlessness persisted.³⁵

Her whole life long Austa encountered individuals who had received the blessing of perfection. All had a remarkable peace and a sweet spirit, yet all were disparaged by other believers, particularly authority figures, as being foolish in one way or another. A number of these figures Austa considered *must* have been sanctified as she looked back on them in memory years afterward, although they never professed it themselves. A few, however, were vocal about receiving the gift. One, a friend in Circleville named Charlotte, offhandedly found a scrap of the *Oberlin Evangelist*, the magazine from the school of Charles Grandison Finney and Asa Mahan, two eminent and very progressive Congregationalists who had begun testifying to Christian perfection in 1836. Charlotte only meant to use the scrap as packing paper, but reading its few lines on the subject of perfection awakened a thirst in her for more knowledge on the topic until she received the blessing six months later. Charlotte was the first to press the matter on Austa by offering her a book about it. During the same period a woman named Mrs. Lawyer Doane stopped by from time to time to read Austa a few inches of the *Evangelist* herself.³⁶

³⁵ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 13, no. 8 (August 1862): 261.

³⁶ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 13, no. 6 (June 1862): 188-89; *BH* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 98.

Austa coolly kept the ladies at arm's length by protesting that if she read what others wrote about perfection then she was obligated to read both sides of the argument, so instead she would keep to the Scriptures only. To her uneasy surprise, however, once she opened the Bible to keep her promise she found the doctrine on every page; she could not avoid it without avoiding God's Word *in toto*. Throughout the New Testament she saw no allowance for believers to continue to sin. Everywhere she saw the command to renounce sin entirely in favor of total purity, and she was certain that God would not issue that command without supplying the capacity to obey it. Yet this was still too difficult a truth for her to face, terrified as she was of the opprobrium that would come from other Christians if she even admitted that she was thinking about it.³⁷

Around this time in 1841-42 a revival in which three to four hundred were converted struck Circleville's Methodists under the ministry of James C. Bontecou with the assistance of Maxwell P. Gaddis. Austa was drawn to see the Methodists' meetings for herself. Before she entered the building she could hear the roaring babble within, and when she ventured inside "[a]ll seemed confusion. . . . But as she entered Mr. Bonticou [sic], rising from the altar around which fifty were kneeling, cried at the top of his voice, 'let every Christian in this house kneel!' " The preacher's command came down with such authority that Austa immediately dropped to her knees in the aisle just inside the door. "Instantly she felt, God is here," and from that moment she went from "aversion

³⁷ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 13, no. 9 (September 1862): 292-94; *BH* 13, no. 11 (November 1862): 358-59.

and contempt” toward the idea of perfection to genuine attraction to the teaching.³⁸

The final blow against Austa’s resistance came when she was forcibly impressed by the words of Jesus in John 5:44: “How can ye believe which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” The question struck at her supreme fear, the fear of disfavor and rejection by others. She had already been refused by her pastor when she asked him to read passages of the Bible pertaining to perfection with her and explain them to her. She had not even admitted to Mansfield that she was upset over the subject. Yet now she was “abashed [and] overwhelmed” at these words of Jesus, recognizing that “[t]he honor of dust and ashes had always been first sought, preferred to his.” Repenting, she forswore others’ esteem in favor of the truth, no matter what it was, and in short order she became convinced that perfection was available to every believer who sought it. She asked Charlotte for help to proclaim openly that “I believe in the hated doctrine of Christian Perfection, and that I will never rest, till possessed of the blessing,” even if her whole Episcopal parish were to reject her in consequence.³⁹

Austa’s fear of rejection came true, not by dismissal from the church but in the form of social coldness, misunderstanding, and disapproval. Yet meanwhile under her influence Mansfield was changing. While he was working at the seminary during the day, Austa selected biblical texts and asked him to explain to her what they meant when he

³⁸ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 98; *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Cincinnati Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Cincinnati: Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1876), 70-71.

³⁹ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 13, no. 6 (June 1862): 188-89; *BH* 13, no. 9 (September 1862): 292-94; *BH* 14, no. 1 (January 1863): 26.

returned home. At first Mansfield proffered standard interpretations that denied perfection in the present life, but prolonged exposure—and most likely Austa herself—changed his mind, and he came to believe in perfection also. He did not admit this to her at first, nor did he admit that he had started enjoying the Methodist meetings that they were attending together.⁴⁰

Moreover, Mansfield did not admit to Austa that, ten years after forsaking his call to ministry, he had started thinking about it again. But by what path could he see it through? The Protestant Episcopal Church was preferable; French's heritage in it was deep, his fellow parishioners in Circleville were warm, and their support of the seminary was considerable—maybe French could keep the school going and receive income from it while simultaneously serving as a pastor. Yet on a few important points French and his imposing bishop, Charles Pettit McIlvaine, had grown apart. Although they shared the same general theological and spiritual outlook, there were contrasting and sometimes conflicting emphases among antebellum Evangelical Episcopalians.⁴¹ On the one side were what Diana Hochstedt Butler calls “democratic evangelicals,” who were inclined to downplay Episcopalian distinctives and mimic evangelical practices in other denominations, including a suspicion of top-down institutional power-structures. These prominently included the faculty and students at Kenyon College, where French had several friends from his own two stints there. On the other side were “authoritarian evangelicals,” who felt that the fire of revival spawned excesses that required control

⁴⁰ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 3 (March 1863): 70-71; *BH* 15, no. 1 (January 1864): 18; *BH* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 99.

⁴¹ For the capitalization of “Evangelical”/“evangelical,” see p. 28 n. 19.

through time-honored Episcopalian structures, including ecclesial-political mechanisms that they were comfortable wielding. These Evangelicals were led in Ohio and also nationwide by Bishop McIlvaine. In one letter McIlvaine wrote of “scolding some parish in the woods for abolition lectures in the Church, or protracted meetings, or even perfectionism” as one of his common episcopal duties. Needless to say, McIlvaine and French no longer saw eye to eye, so French had no future as a minister in the Episcopal Church in Ohio.⁴²

However, if French was to leave the Episcopal Church on account of perfectionism, he had another possible destination. As previously noted, in earlier years French had considered a move to Congregationalism/Presbyterianism and had worked to develop academies affiliated with those united denominations. Even now French had warm relationships with these churches; with their peerless commitment to education, perhaps they would adopt the Circleville Female Seminary as their own if French came their way. Moreover, if minister-educators Charles Grandison Finney and Asa Mahan could espouse perfectionism, then why not Mansfield French?

By comparison the Methodist Episcopal Church seemed like a much inferior option as a place for French to minister. Local Methodists had little interest in the seminary and would not support it—French would have to give up the school and the income from it. The Methodists also tended to be prejudiced against the town’s Episcopalians as conceited, and they would likely be suspicious of French and his

⁴² “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 99; Diana Hochstedt Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 83-84.

attitude. Yet French could not shake his budding attraction to the Methodist Church as the place where God's power could be felt and where many received the blessing of holiness that the Frenches were now seeking. One evening he and Austa sat on the porch of their home and had the decisive conversation. "What would you think of my giving up everything and becoming a Methodist minister, if they will accept of us?" Mansfield began. His pride broken, he was finally "willing now to be half a minister," which he had feared before, "if he could only save souls." "Only let us be holy," Austa answered him. "I can live upon bread and water *only let us be holy*." Mansfield wanted to be sure that Austa had counted the cost. "It may take the bread out of the mouths of our children if I give up this school," he warned. Austa was undaunted. "Only let us be holy, and do the will of God, it is all I ask! Oh if I could see you actually saving souls, I care nothing what we suffer, nothing."⁴³

So Mansfield and Austa French became Methodists in the fall of 1843.⁴⁴ Their new church was not entirely without advantages; notably, the Methodist Church had a much wider range of opportunities for a member to proclaim the gospel than the Frenches were used to. John Wesley's system was founded on the regular gathering of "bands" of a few believers and "classes" of about twelve to thirty, and unlike the churches with which the Frenches were familiar, every member—male and female, old and young, literate and illiterate—was expected to testify in one setting or another. The Frenches got involved in these meetings right away: the day after they joined the church Mansfield was surprised

⁴³ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 14, no. 4 (April 1863): 98-99.

⁴⁴ The Frenches had their conversation on the porch, indicating relatively warm weather at the time. Mansfield served as a Methodist local preacher in Circleville during the winter of 1843-44; see "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 15, no. 2 (February 1864): 43-44.

and temporarily mortified to hear Austa's voice beside him testifying at a meeting.⁴⁵ It was not long before French assumed a prominent role in exhorting at and then leading these meetings on his way to becoming a full-time Methodist preacher.

It was at a band meeting that Mansfield had a watershed spiritual experience. Late that evening at home Austa was startled to hear the gate slam followed by the doors to the house. Suddenly Mansfield burst in, his face lit up. "My dear Austa, the Lord has sanctified my soul!" he cried. "Oh, such purity! such love as he has given me!" Then he dashed to the children to kiss them while they slept. "Oh, my dear, dear children," he exclaimed, "father never loved you before, never, nor you, my dear [Austa], [I] never knew what love was. Oh, such love! such love! my heart would burst if I could not shout to express it! You think me noisy, but I do not begin to express what I feel." Austa was speechless with tearful joy as Mansfield paced back and forth, ecstatically "lost in God." He remained in this transport for days. French could now preach the sanctification that he not only believed but had received one hour after he finally, completely "gave himself up" to seek it. This was the witness of the Spirit by almost any Methodist's definition, certainly John Wesley's.⁴⁶

However, the life of perfection proved not to be perfect. For one thing, Mansfield's sanctification soon caused heartache in Austa and silent tension between her and Mansfield. Mansfield had received the blessing almost immediately after seeking it wholeheartedly while Austa had been yearning, praying, and fasting for it for a long time

⁴⁵ "Seal Broken," *BH* 10, no. 11: 335. This was startlingly different from what French was used to among Episcopalians and Congregationalists/Presbyterians despite the high esteem given to women's spirituality among the latter.

⁴⁶ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 14, no. 5 (May 1863): 117.

with no result. She had even convinced others to seek perfection, had walked forward with them to the altar (preaching platform) at the meetings to plead with God for the gift, and had seen the persons who accompanied her testify to receiving perfect love while she came up empty. As she struggled with envy, Mansfield unwittingly made matters worse by seeming indifferent to Austa's plight. He proceeded in blithe confidence that anyone seeking as sincerely as Austa was was sure to get the blessing sooner or later while there were many who were not yet convinced to seek it who needed his attention. To make matters worse, the heaven-enraptured Mansfield was now exuding warm emotion that had been missing in their marriage for some time, and Austa had unrealistic expectations of how much of it should be directed at her.⁴⁷

Nevertheless Austa came to take a critical step without Mansfield's help. As Sarah Lankford and Phoebe Palmer did several years before—although we have no evidence of their direct influence on Austa French at this time—Austa came to believe that she was sanctified simply on the basis of her faith in God's promise to sanctify, despite that she had no spiritual-emotional experience to validate the claim. Unfortunately for Austa, when she furtively professed her sanctification-without-feelings to a couple of fellow believers, they were skeptical. Even Mansfield doubted her, which pained her still more. Yet Austa pressed on in faith in spite of the skepticism of those who testified to the great experiences they had when they were perfected. When she was tempted to react badly to the annoyances of homemaking, the trials did not make her doubt that she had really been perfected but rather "only rendered her perfect rest, and peace in God, more sweet. . . . It

⁴⁷ "Christian's Privilege," *BH* 14, no. 5 (May 1863): 117-18.

was now no more the sternly repressed impatience, or sorrow, but joy, unspeakable.”⁴⁸

But her tortuous journey to confirmed perfection was not over yet. One day Mansfield offhandedly gave Austa an instruction just before leaving the house that so wounded her feelings that she thought that her hurt was evidence that her fragile sanctification was gone. Immediately she was overcome by vindictive rage at her absent husband, and afterward try as she might she could not return to faith that God would resanctify her when she begged for it. Eventually, however, her deliverance came. One day when the French family worshiped together at home, they sang a hymn that ran,

Thou canst! thou wilt! I dare believe!
So arm me with thy power
That I to sin may never cleave,
May never feel it more.

As Austa sang these words, she sensed within “a cold, dry, willful determination, to believe God.” Austa had faith that this was faith; she believed that she believed. She silently vowed that “if I never have a ray of light, or Love, God is true.” Standing on the biblical injunction “ask, and ye shall receive,” she declared, “I ask, and I receive, in fact though not in feeling in the least. . . . I dare believe! I dare believe!” Finally, God communicated to her soul, “[N]ow I know that thou believest.” The witness of the Spirit had come, though even now not with the overwhelming force that others had experienced. Later she summoned the courage to confess that she had been sanctified to the whole church. As she did so, “the sweet assurance was gently given” and she knew it to be the truth, “a great precious fact.” Whether she ever experienced the heights of

⁴⁸ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 5 (May 1863): 118; *BH* 14, no. 12 (December 1863): 290-91; *BH* 15, no. 1 (January 1864): 19.

elation others did she did not say, but she was hardly unemotional about holiness—her heart throbbed for the whole church to experience perfect love forever after.⁴⁹

Meanwhile Mansfield was having his own problems with the delicate relationship between perfection and emotion. When he was sanctified, in his own words, “he came into this blessing with such a flood of light and ecstasy that . . . he confessed, just in proportion to his feeling from day to day.” So long as he felt the elevation of an energized protracted meeting his profession of having received the gift was continual. Yet unknowingly “he whittled down his confession to his feelings . . . till he had whittled it all away.” He had received the gift by faith, but now that he was unconsciously relying on his emotions to confirm that he still possessed it, he was walking by sight. When his feelings faded, his sanctification went with them, and losing the blessing drove him into spiritual anguish.⁵⁰

French was still working hard as a minister—seemingly as a local preacher⁵¹—despite his regression, while in the meantime crying out to God to be perfected again. Eventually in a meeting he took the same step that Austa had, testifying aloud, “I will believe, I receive the things I ask, upon the bare promise of God.” Nothing happened. He repeated again, “Yes, I will, I do believe, I receive the blessing . . . and I will, by grace, never doubt God more, never, though I should never have another ray of light.” Upon a bold confession like this a seeker usually received the witness of the Spirit and exploded

⁴⁹ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 15, no. 2 (February 1864): 43-46; *BH* 15, no. 4 (April 1864): 93-94; *BH* 15, no. 5 (May 1864): 117-19.

⁵⁰ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 12 (December 1863): 291.

⁵¹ At this time the Frenches were living next to the church where Mansfield served; presumably this was a parsonage; see “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 15, no. 2 (February 1864): 43-44.

with shouts of joy, and the other believers in the meeting waited expectantly to hear it from French. But still it did not come. Instead he cried out for a third time, “I will sooner die than doubt God, his Word, his promises.” Still nothing—God was apparently putting French’s vow to the test.⁵²

Three weeks later, in the summer of 1844,⁵³ the Frenches went to a camp meeting near Columbus, and Mansfield was asked by the organizer to preach. He declined the request until the time when the meeting was ripe for mourners—that is, the unconverted convinced to seek salvation and believers earnestly seeking sanctification—to be invited to plead with God at the altar. French then gathered a group of faithful men to pray with him some distance from the campground, and when he returned to the platform to preach those men continued praying. French’s sermon that day was on sanctification, and he emphasized the necessity of faith “with great clearness and force” that gripped his hearers. He concluded his message by telling his personal story and describing how faith in God’s promise had to replace experiential feelings in his own life. “For the last three weeks I have been enabled continually to obey the command, ‘Reckon yourselves dead, indeed, unto sin, but alive unto God,’ ” he proclaimed, quoting Romans 6:11. “I do obey. . . . I do believe, believe, believe! upon God for full salvation. I have it by faith. It is now this moment mine, and I will never doubt, by grace, if I never have a ray”—but suddenly he stopped. At that moment the “floods of light and glory . . . poured upon his soul” as they had at the band meeting months before. Ecstatic, he shouted into the

⁵² “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 12 (December 1863): 291.

⁵³ In an 1846 letter to Austa, French references a powerful “camp meeting 2 years ago” that is almost certainly the one described here; see M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP.

mounting cries of praise in the congregation, “I have got the witness this moment. Glory, glory be to God.”

The praying comrades returned to the meeting as French was inviting listeners to the altar. The space in front of the platform was filled at once, “and in just half an hour over eighty were most clearly blessed with full salvation” and “a multitude of sinners were converted.” Many cried aloud, some collapsed, others were lost in a contemplative sort of trance, still others wandered around with inexpressible joy written on their faces. The atmosphere of power and glory was so thick that even attenders who had enjoyed holiness for many years were asking each other, “Is this earth or heaven?”⁵⁴

The Frenches’ spiritual journeys were complicated, but in the end Austa found holiness through the simple steps of consecration, faith, and confession. This was exactly what the Worrall sisters were prescribing in faraway New York even though the initial skepticism expressed by Mansfield and others to Austa’s first confession indicates that Phoebe Palmer’s teaching was still unknown or at least not widely accepted in Circleville, Ohio in 1844. Austa may well have arrived at the same process all by herself, although she may not have been entirely conscious that those were the steps that she performed until she came into contact with Palmer later. As for Mansfield, he received perfect love in classic Wesleyan style, but he could not retain the blessing without confessing it in the absence of feeling as Palmer enjoined. Yet in his case feelings were by no means absent, subdued, or solemnized; to the contrary, his camp meeting confession ignited a white-hot explosion of fervor comparable to the camp meetings of a

⁵⁴ “Christian’s Privilege,” *BH* 14, no. 12 (December 1863): 291-92.

generation before.

The cross-cutting currents of old and new spirituality visible in the Frenches' paths to perfection exhibit only one of the tensions within Northern Methodism when Mansfield and Austa joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. Those tensions made the timing and manner of the Frenches' transfer of membership and sanctification in 1843-44 truly unusual.

Northern Methodism, 1844

In some ways it made sense for Mansfield French to become a Methodist preacher in 1843-44. For one thing, Methodists were everywhere—not only were they by far the largest denomination in the United States, but they were particularly plentiful where the Frenches were living. By 1860 the thickest settlement of Methodists in the nation, aside from a small but dense cluster around upper Chesapeake Bay, was a band stretching from southwestern Pennsylvania across central and southern Ohio and Indiana. In 1841 editor Charles Elliott estimated that between one third and more than half of Ohio residents were either members of or “adherents” to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Elliott concluded that “[t]he state of Ohio is particularly a Methodist state.”⁵⁵

Moreover, the leadership structure that directed the Methodist system—from class leaders to exhorters to local preachers to traveling preachers to presiding elders to bishops—was open to any man (and at the lower rungs of the ladder in some cases,

⁵⁵ Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities before the Civil War, with Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing upon the College Movement*, American Education: Its Men, Ideas and Institutions, Lawrence A. Cremin, ed. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 106, map 12; “Methodists in the State of Ohio,” *Western Christian Advocate*, January 22, 1841. Elliott put the ratio of adherents (or “hearers”) to members at between five to one and seven to one.

woman) regardless of his formal educational attainment. Indeed, in an earlier generation of American Methodists, formal education was looked at with suspicion as a potential detriment. Nevertheless even then Methodists prized education through apprenticeship and self-study, and by the time of French's denominational shift the old attitude toward academic education had largely passed away. From 1830 to 1860 Methodists made up for lost time in the antebellum avalanche of college establishment, founding thirty-four colleges in less than thirty years, second only to the Presbyterians in total by the Civil War. Yet even with its newfound respect for formal learning, the denomination still did not require a college degree to be authorized to preach at any level.⁵⁶ French's failure to secure a degree from Kenyon was no obstacle to ministry among the Methodists. In fact, despite his lack of a college degree, as a veteran academy principal he was one of the more highly educated preachers in the system. If French's object in changing denominations was to do good by preaching, the Methodist Church was clearly the way to go; the academic qualifications that he had made him attractive while the ones that he lacked did not disqualify him.

Despite these reasons for French to join the Methodists, however, French's experience with holiness and his denominational transition were strange in several respects. The chief oddity is the timing. French joined the Methodists when the denomination and evangelicalism generally were suffering a crisis of vision marked by stagnation and schism, not when they were surging ahead in conversions and power.

⁵⁶ Simpson, *Hundred Years*, 211-19; Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War*, American Ways Series (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 37-39; Tewksbury, *Founding of American Colleges*, 103-11.

From the beginning, Methodists in America had been united in John Wesley's articulation of their mission—namely, “to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”⁵⁷ By the mid-1840s, however, what precisely that mission entailed had become a contested question along at least two axes.

The first axis of tension had to do with the preferred mode of revivalism. The most popular revivalistic instrument among Methodists at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the camp meeting, a massive, multi-day gathering that drew hundreds and even thousands of settlers on the sparsely populated frontier for religious exercises. These meetings began as ecumenical affairs born both from the Presbyterian tradition of annual sacramental celebrations of Holy Communion and from the Methodist routine of Quarterly Meetings; Baptist ministers were also known to take part. Camp meetings on the frontier from 1800 to 1803 were enormous affairs in dramatic woodland settings that featured extreme and bizarre emotive behavior by participants; they were also immensely effective in securing evangelical conversions. In a short time many Presbyterians, who had been central to the genesis of these meetings, became disenchanted by the lack of Calvinistic adherence among converts, but other denominations eagerly adopted the method. In particular, Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury enthusiastically promoted camp meetings as an auxiliary to the standard Methodist class system. Under Asbury's leadership, Methodists far and wide employed the device, subjected it to their typically outstanding organizational prowess, and multiplied it all over the West while also introducing it back East. In the process American Methodist leaders made the camp

⁵⁷ *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, Held in London by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the Year 1744* (London: John Mason, 1862), 1:447.

meeting—both in their own minds and in popular conception—an inherently Methodist phenomenon.⁵⁸

However, even around the time that Methodists adopted the camp meeting on the Western frontier there was debate within the church in Eastern cities and towns over how much vocal and physical expression of religious emotion was legitimate in public worship. As it happened, intense emotional expression in meetings did not start among Methodists with camp meetings at the turn of the nineteenth century. As early as 1765 in revivals among Methodists around the Chesapeake worshipers white and black experienced “manifestations of the power of God or the outpouring of the Spirit” through simultaneous falling to the ground, mournful crying by the unconverted, and shouts of joy from both newly and previously converted. Such manifestations could be so widespread in a meeting that itinerant preachers were prevented from delivering their sermons and had to be contented with circulating among the crowd to give encouragement one on one.⁵⁹

After the Revolution, however, some urban Methodists ascended into the middle class, and these, despite conceding the place of great expressions of emotion at the moment of conversion or in private prayer, were scandalized by displays of falling, mourning, and shouting in public worship. They considered such actions to be ignorant behaviors that embarrassed them before their upscale acquaintances whom they hoped to draw into the church and see converted. However, to the lower-class whites and blacks

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 41-98.

⁵⁹ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86-90.

who made up the mass of Methodists, these behaviors were intrinsic to worship. Though rarely noted today, this controversy was a significant component of Philadelphia's black Methodists' departure to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁶⁰

Meanwhile in the West, although there was no outright dispute over the matter of physical demonstrations in worship, conductors of camp meetings after 1805 found ways to curb the most extreme actions such as running, jerking, and barking. Those behaviors virtually disappeared while shouting and the like continued. However, by the 1830s and '40s the camp meeting itself was on the wane as civilization in the Northwest came to resemble that in the East. The number of camp meetings each year decreased. Many of the annual camp meetings that remained were held at permanent seasonal settlements with increasingly elaborate appointments, and the intensity of the proceedings seemed to diminish in proportion to the physical comfort of the participants. Revival fervor did not disappear from the landscape, however: indoor "protracted meetings" kept camp meeting intensity going in cities and towns and replaced it as the primary vehicle of revivalism. The new technique of protracted meetings became popular among Methodists on both sides of the Alleghenies.⁶¹

However, starting in 1837, the year of a major financial panic, even protracted meetings lost much of their potency. Despite (or perhaps because of) how the revivalist and the revival meeting had become standard institutions in American life, the rate of conversions secured by them shrank considerably from its peak in the early 1830s.

⁶⁰ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 76-77, 90-98.

⁶¹ Johnson, *Frontier Camp Meeting*, 94-97, 244-49; see pp. 29, 70-72 above.

Controversy and schism in the Methodist Church, described below, smothered that denomination's explosive growth to a mere one-half percent between 1840 and 1850.⁶²

Nevertheless, the budding Holiness Movement proposed a solution to this unaccustomed stagnation that vexed evangelicals. Outside the Methodists, perfectionist Charles Grandison Finney was still working hard at protracted meetings despite the smaller yield. Although Finney is remembered for the emotionalism of his meetings—and compared to worship conducted by most Eastern Presbyterians and Congregationalists, they were indeed emotive—his evangelistic sermons were highly rational, arguing to the audience according to Finney's lawyerly training. Finney disliked the train of his logic being derailed by loud, spontaneous praying, mourning, and shouting and sought to keep his meetings under control. Among the Methodists meanwhile, Phoebe Palmer, who had long distrusted the reliability of emotion as a mark of acceptance with God, demanded total commitment to Christ whether her hearers felt anything in her meetings or not. Furthermore, Palmer asserted that if the whole Methodist Episcopal Church emphasized entire sanctification as singlemindedly as she did, the denomination would recover the growth rate of former days. According to her biographer Charles Edward White,

Mrs. Palmer preached holiness because she was convinced that sanctification was the key to revival. Others had urged that when nonbelievers were present, holiness should not be presented, and they attributed the decline in the effectiveness of camp meetings to the preaching of holiness. Phoebe Palmer vigorously resisted this idea, saying that, according to Wesley and in her own experience, the more holiness was preached, the more sinners were converted. She believed that people dismissed the Christian faith because they were dissatisfied with the unholy lives

⁶² Clifton E. Olmstead, *History of Religion in the United States* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 350; Charles C. Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826–1860*, Columbia Studies in the Social Sciences 580 (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 77-78; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 48-49.

of many professed Christians. The way to win the unconverted, she said, was to announce the good news that believers need not be mired in sin but could live holy lives. When the Christian life was presented in its fullness, then even infidels would be attracted to it.

Here was a revivalistic package built for the new era of the mid-nineteenth century: a message of personal perfection with socially activist results delivered in gatherings for urban people where the emotional atmosphere was rich yet its expression was tightly controlled.⁶³

Set against this backdrop, Mansfield French's sanctification and early Methodist ministry are even more striking. In some ways his experience was typical of the times, of course—protracted meetings were crucial for the town-dwelling Frenches, and Mansfield experienced sanctification through a band meeting of the old Methodist system. Yet in their rural part of Ohio even as late as the mid-1840s camp meetings were still going strong, and one of them was critical to Mansfield's experience of holiness. And what an experience it was! While urbane revivalism tended toward a spiritual atmosphere of powerful solemnity, the Columbus-area camp meeting of 1844 at which French preached exhibited the collective expressions of ecstasy of the revivals of old. Nor was this a one-off manifestation in French's career. Two years later French conducted a camp meeting at a place called "Mariotts"⁶⁴ marked by the same phenomena, as he described to Austa:

Our great Captain is still working most gloriously. Many are the slain of the Lord. Last evening (Wednesday) we had the largest congregation, most mourners, & most power. Such a night was never seen here before. The conversions were many & powerful. . . . A little boy about as old as Br. Freeman's oldest, the son of the class leader was converted & shouted astonishingly. We had the men of Galilee to

⁶³ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 58-59; White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 167-68.

⁶⁴ "Mariotts" may mean "Mariott's"—i.e., a farm owned by a man named Mariott.

look on & wonder, Presb[y]t[erians], Covenanters [i.e., Reformed Presbyterians], Unionists, Campbellites [i.e., Restorationists], Radicals, Universalists. It seemed as if King Jesus embraced the opportunity to exhibit the power of his grace. The solemnity of a graveyard pervaded the minds of the wicked. . . .

I read and commented on the 37th Ps[alm] about 12 or 15 v[erse]s of it. My soul was on the wing. . . . Br. Taylor while praying for the mourners became exceedingly happy, shouted & praised the Lord with the new tongue of love. . . . I had great liberty. Eleven mourners were at the altar—4 or 5 converted—2 powerfully & shouted the praises of their savior.⁶⁵

Last evening was a night of great power. . . . Twelve came to the altar. Six of the number were converted, 4 of them powerfully. They “praised God with a loud voice on high”. O the power that attended the meeting. I never witnessed such perfect order thro’ the entire meeting, as has been here. Everybody seemed solemn. Seven more joined the church making in all 31. I then called all, who had joined, forward & forming a circle, they passed round shaking hands, as the ladies in Calisthenics used to, while the brethren sang, a hymn with the chorus, “We are all united heart & hand &c”. Some were so much blessed that they could scarcely get around. They had to stop and shout. O what a sight was this. The older brethren & sisters then came into the ring & went round shaking hands with them. The wicked were astonished and confounded at the display of God’s power.⁶⁶

About 100 attended the meeting this morning. I read & commented on the 4th of Jeremiah, then followed speaking. Many spoke who were filled with the Spirit. All in the house felt the presence of the Lord. I then called for mourners. To my astonishment 17 rushed right forward, many of them married people, several over 40 & 50 years of age. The presence of the Lord was more sensibly felt than I have seen it at as any meeting during the winter. Br. Lagston while praying for the mourners was powerfully blessed, he sprang to his feet, prayed standing—went over the house praying. Shook hands with some Campbellites praying returned within the altar praying & while standing then praying he was struck to the floor by the power of God as quick as if prostrated by lightning. He lay motionless on his back for some time. O the spirit of supplication that pervaded the church & the mourners. There was something peculiar in the character of it. None seemed to be supplicating an offended deity, but a God of love—whose throne beamed with tenderness. There was a sweetness attending the spirits of all, that is indescribable.

⁶⁵ M. French to A. French, June 11, 1846, FFP.

⁶⁶ M. French to A. French, June 13, 1846, FFP. This was scheduled to be the last night of the meeting, but rather than close the activities French adjourned the meeting to another site a short distance away called “Mt. Zion”—seemingly a church building. The procedure of shaking hands goodbye around a large circle was a standard camp meeting parting ritual; see Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 162.

The drops of mercy soon began to fall. Some were most powerfully blessed & others soundly converted. O that you could have participated in the love, the joy & the glory of the scene. . . .

Last evening the very heavens & earth seemed to meet. . . . Twenty fell down wounded at the altar. Some 7 or 8 died to sin and were made alive to God—I never saw a more solemn & interesting time. At the close of the prayers for mourners. They were requested to stand while we sang a hymn, with the chorus, “We are marching thro’ &c. waters flow so sweetly &c.”—I passed round & Shook hands with them—I rec[eive]d such a baptism of love that I went to every man & boy in the house—The shower fell on all. I never witnessed the like. Several mourners were converted on their feet. Some of the brethren rec[eive]d the blessing of perfect love, confessing it. Many fell to the floor—all felt the power—The baptism & shouting at the camp meeting 2 yrs ago was not so interesting as this scene. It beggars all description. . . . The wicked of all description tremble as in the day of slaughter. . . .

The morning meeting yesterday was one of great power, liberty & love. . . . After the close of the speaking exercises, Some 15 or 18 came forward, several converted. The physical energies of the brethren were much exhausted by the labors of last eve. The meeting was considered better than any previous morning meeting. . . . Last evening all could not get into the church. Solemn time. About 20 at the altar. I never saw a more general spirit of prayer among both mourners & Christians. There was no abatement for about one hour, nearly every one could be heard praying. Now the work of conversion began. O how glorious, how clear. Br. Lagston had a son about 20 converted, who required two or three brethren to hold him within bounds. He was so filled with love, joy & glory—For about one hour & half there was nothing but shouting, rejoicings among the 8 or 10 who were converted, & strong cries on the part of those at the altar who were still unconverted. The wicked looked on in utter amazement, while the hosts of Israel praised the Lord God “with a loud voice on high”—I cannot give you an adequate description of what was witnessed. The oldest brethren say they never saw the like of the past two days & whereunto it will grow we cannot say.⁶⁷

Readers of modern histories of nineteenth-century revivalism are led to believe that religious phenomena such as these had virtually disappeared long before 1846, not to appear again until the birth of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century. That may be largely true—as French reports, even the old-timers in Martinsburg had never before

⁶⁷ M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP.

encountered anything like this camp meeting. But if that is so, then Mansfield French had a very unusual experience for his era. He became sanctified in an interval when revivals had become comparatively scarce; his sanctification carried emotional freight that the new Holiness teaching shied away from; and his preaching stimulated bodily expressions of awesome dread and exuberant bliss that had rarely been seen for a generation or more. These early experiences in Methodism stamped him into a peculiar shape that prepared him for the peculiar career that lay ahead. A significant part of that impress was French's divestment of the expectations of his social class. He had not only taken up an occupation that severely jeopardized his ability to keep up appearances materially, but he was worshiping with and fully in the style of socially humble rural folk. A camp meeting like this was quite simply one of the least likely places to find a seminary principal and an especially unlikely place to find one conducting the proceedings.

Although Mansfield French was a new Methodist, he was also, oddly, an old-fashioned Methodist, one of a vanishing breed. As an Episcopalian he had always staunchly stood against "formalism,"⁶⁸ and he held the same ground as a Methodist—rather ironically, since the Episcopalian French of 1832 probably would have seemed quite formalistic to the Methodist French of 1844. Nevertheless, although the absolute location of the points on the spectrum of formality and liberty shifted when French moved from one denomination to another, his relative position in his new church was the same: the utmost edge of liberty. Worship in the Methodist Episcopal Church was on a gradual path to becoming as neatly ordered as its ecclesial structure, and for the rest of

⁶⁸ See pp. 27-28, 73-74.

his life French fought the trend.⁶⁹

As it was, however, the structural conditions of the Methodist Episcopal Church when French joined it in 1843-44 were far from neatly ordered. To the contrary, they were strained beyond the breaking point by the second axis of tension in this era, which increasingly racked the whole nation: slavery.

In the eighteenth century, Methodists in both England and America were hostile to the institution, a posture that continued until about 1830. However, in the United States antislavery sentiment among Methodists existed in principle more than in fact—numerous slaveholders subscribed to emancipationist views and societies although they took no action with respect to their own slaves ahead of the rest of the nation. In the early 1830s, however, the immediate emancipationism of William Lloyd Garrison and others of his generation began to win adherents among some Methodists in the Upper North—the Yankee territory of New England, central and western New York, northern Ohio, and Michigan. New Methodist abolitionists like Orange Scott began openly agitating for immediate emancipation as a qualification for membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. This move coincided with a growing defense of slavery as compatible with Christian teaching in the Deep South. For disturbing the unity of the church the abolitionists were silenced by an anxious General Conference and the church's bishops until 1840, an imposed peace that could not have been achieved without the cooperation of Northern moderates. However, the lid blew off in 1841-43 when a group of abolitionist

⁶⁹ "Christianity—Formalism," *BH* 7, no. 1 (January 1856): 7; M. French to A. French, April 7, 1857, FFP; "Our Past and Future," *BH* 8, no. 12 (December 1857): 380; "The Methodist General Conference," *BH* 11, no. 7 (July 1860): 223; M. French to A. French, March 24, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 24, 1870, FFP.

Methodists led by Scott split from the Methodist Church to form the Wesleyan Connection to protest the acceptance of slaveowners as members in the church and what they saw as anti-democratic episcopal high-handedness toward dissenting voices. Northern moderates had been preoccupied with fears of Southern secession from the church, but the specter of *Northern* secession awakened them to press the denomination to take stronger action on slavery so as not to lose the entire denomination in the Upper North, which appeared to be a tangible possibility. With moderates swinging from an alliance with Southerners to cooperation with abolitionists, votes on several individual issues that pertained to the acceptability of slavery at the 1844 General Convention made Southerners feel marginalized and threatened. Eventually a plan was put forth to form two General Conferences, North and South, that jointly supported foreign missions and publishing. The plan passed 136 to 15. In 1845 Southern conferences met in Louisville to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁷⁰

In the tumultuous years leading up to the 1844-45 schism, and even for years afterwards when the Northern church tried to cling to its border conferences, the Holiness Movement led by Phoebe Palmer again proffered a solution—of sorts. The solution was, in essence, to avoid worldly adiaphora like slavery altogether to focus on the one thing that mattered: holiness, the panacea that if universally received by faith would make all other problems disappear. Palmer's position was not shaped by naïveté alone, however, but also by a practical dilemma. Her flowering movement had become popular among the

⁷⁰ John R. McKivigan, *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830–1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 84-87; William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 229-53.

highest echelon of the church—bishops were attending to her teaching in her parlor. Their endorsement expanded the audience for this laywoman’s message of sanctification to the whole country; now she needed them to confirm the legitimacy of her teaching in order to give it a wide hearing. As historian Timothy L. Smith pointed out, these bishops, notably “[h]er fast friends, Bishops Edmund Janes and Leonidas Hamline,” were desperate to maintain the unity of the church both before and after the schism. They “were the architects of the policy of silence which later became the regret of Northern Methodism.”

An array of Methodist luminaries including

George and Jesse Peck, Nathan Bangs, Alfred Cookman, and a host of her other admirers supported [the policy] fully. . . . In such circumstances the otherworldly and spiritual aspects of Phoebe Palmer’s quest for perfect love readily won out over the impulse to antislavery reform. Although early to take part in the relief of the widowed, orphaned, and imprisoned or in any other task which required the exercise of compassion, her New York and Philadelphia coterie were laggards in whatever demanded stern attacks on persons and institutions.⁷¹

However, this formidable array of denominational heavy-hitters who sought to smother any linkage between holiness and abolitionism could not stop others from making the connection. The episcopal-Palmerite solution to the problem of abolition—namely, silence and neutrality—was superficial and self-contradictory. Perfectionists were, as historian Melvin Easterday Dieter put it,

puritan-pietists . . . with the “puritan” element generally used to denote the revivalist’s concerns for morality, conduct, and the reform of the church and society according to the laws of God; “pietist” is utilized to refer to their concern for individual Christian experience, centering in both conversion and sanctification—all under the direct and personal guidance and power of the Holy

⁷¹ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 211-12; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 59. Palmer’s view of holiness as the answer to all social problems, including slavery, was echoed by its proponents decades later vis-à-vis Gilded Age problems attendant to industrialization and urbanization; see Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 8.

Spirit. . . . Perfectionism kept the puritan dream alive in the former's preachments concerning the new age of the Spirit and the coming millennium; at the same time, it put new emphasis upon the pietistic doctrines of experience in its insistence that only as each Christian realized the fullness of the blessings of the baptism of the Spirit in his own life could the age of the Spirit become a reality.

Sanctification was intended to satisfy the craving for perfection, and to the Yankee mind especially individual perfection necessarily entailed social perfection, and social perfection had to eliminate the greatest social evil, slavery. Again, Dieter:

Abolitionism was absolutist or ultraist in its moral perceptions; it was most natural for perfectionism to head that way. In its religious expression perfectionism demanded complete consecration to the known will and purposes of God. This level of dedication provided a ready springboard for insistence upon ultimate answers to moral and ethical questions. The relationship between perfectionism and the anti-slavery crusade, therefore, was not coincidental.⁷²

It also was not coincidental that perfectionists in every denomination other than the Methodist Episcopal Church became outspoken abolitionists. The Oberlin College Congregationalists and Presbyterians, of course, are the prime example. It is also highly significant that Orange Scott and the Wesleyan Connection believed in holiness as firmly as Phoebe Palmer. The unwillingness of the Methodist leadership to emphasize explicitly the connection between holiness and antislavery stoked the Wesleyans' disenchantment.⁷³

Mansfield French joined the Methodist Episcopal Church at a sensitive time, and it was a peculiar moment for him also. It is highly probable that he was an abolitionist in viewpoint, but he was not an activist yet. He arrived too late to be made into an activist by Orange Scott's crusade although he almost certainly agreed with Scott's association of holiness and abolition, especially in light of French's later words on the subject. It is

⁷² Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 8, 13-15 n. 25, 24-25.

⁷³ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 148-62, 180-85, 204-24; Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 15-62, 73-84.

unknown how he viewed the secession of the Southern portion of the church—he may have felt vindictive, glad that the impure had departed, or indifferent—but in any case he was too new in the tribe for that happenstance to make him an outspoken abolitionist. Nevertheless, he probably was not much influenced by the policy of silence emanating from the center of the Holiness Movement in New York City either, because in the following decade Phoebe Palmer remained silent, but Mansfield French did not.

French and the Old Testament: Spiritual Warfare for Sinners' Freedom

As a new preacher, Mansfield French was humbled and awed by the privilege that God gave him to preach the gospel and to be employed mightily in the salvation of sinners. The overwhelming outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the 1846 Mariotts camp meeting and its aftermath prompted French to burst forth in amazement,

O my dear wife how all this humbles me in the very dust. Thought that a worm like me, whose past life has been any thing but that of devotion to God, should now be employed to advance his cause in this way. I say employed—for I feel that the Lord has called me, he sends me, as he sent his prophets of old. I am not warring on my own charges or responsibility. O I would not dare tell some of my ministerial brethren, the *peculiarities* of my call, the striking condescension of my commission & the *assurance* of faith as to the results. O hallelujah to my blessed Jesus. In his service let me live, in it let me die. O how *fully* consecrated I am.⁷⁴

French's identification of himself with the Old Testament prophets was sincere, because that portion of the Bible had become very dear to him. Too little from his own pen from his Episcopalian years survives for us to guess with confidence what his favorite parts of the Bible were from his conversion until his sanctification. Yet it may be observed that although a godly view of things pervades his long letters to Austa during

⁷⁴ M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP.

their courtship in the early 1830s, he rarely quotes the Bible in them. By stark contrast, in Mansfield's few letters to Austa from the mid-1840s that we possess, biblical allusions are legion. Of these allusions, the majority come from the Old Testament.⁷⁵

French certainly held the New Testament dear as well, preaching from it first of all because he intended to draw people's attention to the person of Jesus Christ as their available Savior. At one camp meeting session "[i]t seemed as if King Jesus embraced the opportunity to exhibit the power of his grace. . . . The Lord gave me great liberty in setting before them the Carpenter's Son. . . ." At another session French preached on 1 Timothy 1:15: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." French also preached New Testament stories and parables that emphasized repentance, like the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. One of the very few extant sermons that can probably be dated to the 1850s comes from the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. In his introduction French called out, "Are any of you here *willing* to come to [Christ]? If so *when*? Then hear God's invitation." After working his way through the text, French concluded,

While all the people at Sychar are going out to see the [Christ] . . . Are there some of us who refuse? Let me ask why? In the final place, your hearts are unwilling, & [someone] is opposed to it, others together cannot be resisted. Let nothing, my Friends, prevent your coming to see Jesus. Say "I too w[oul]d see Jesus." If the Samaritans c[oul]d have seen you they w[oul]d have taken you by the hand & said Come along & see this Extraordinary, this Blessed . . . He is such a one as you

⁷⁵ French's extant sermon notes—a very small quantity relative to the total number of sermons he preached over his career—are evenly split between Old Testament and New Testament texts. Of the documents in the French Family Papers that may confidently be deemed sermon notes (the great bulk of them dating from the 1870s), sixteen come mostly from an Old Testament text, sixteen mostly from a New Testament text, and one based evenly on an Old Testament and a New Testament text. Moreover, one of the New Testament sermons (Romans 14:13) draws heavily upon Old Testament support.

have never seen. Come & see Jesus. Because a sight of Him will show you your . . . sinfulness. He will tell you all things &. Especially c[oul]d you see him at the Cross, as he hung there . . . in his blood.⁷⁶

French could preach conversion from the Old Testament just as smoothly, however, using it as a pedestal on which to display New Testament doctrine. For example, at the morning exercise on June 15, 1846 during the continuation of the Mariotts camp meeting at a place called “Mt. Zion” (probably the name of a church building), French preached on Jeremiah 4 and seventeen mourners rushed forward. That night he preached on Hosea 13:9 and twenty more came forward. The next morning he preached on Psalm 34 and fifteen to eighteen more came to the altar. Moreover, French preached sanctification from the Old Testament at least as confidently as from the New. At a camp meeting in 1852 he preached on holiness, about which Austa later commented, “At this Camp meeting God owned His servant in the most wonderful manner. He preached from the text from the Almighty God, Walk before me and be thou perfect”—that is, the words of Genesis 17:1. She continued, “It was a sermon some declared they never heard equalled upon that sacred theme. 50 mourners were at the altar.”⁷⁷

French therefore considered the Old Testament to be every bit as pertinent to nineteenth-century Christians as the New. He saw New Testament doctrines of conversion and sanctification and New Testament ethics exhibited in the Old Testament, and he propounded them without hesitation, qualification, explanation, or apology from the texts where he found them. Yet the Old Testament was for French more than a display

⁷⁶ M. French to A. French, June 11, 1846, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 13, 1846, FFP; Mansfield French, untitled sermon (Luke 15), FFP; French, sermon, John 4:29, FFP.

⁷⁷ M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP; M. French to A. French, August 20, 1852, FFP.

case for New Testament ideas. The Old Testament also provided French with the substance of a conceptual matrix that powerfully sculpted the shape of the world as he saw it. This matrix depended upon a typological reading of the Old Testament that associated individuals, groups, places, and objects described in Old Testament literature with corresponding antitypes in the Christian era in general or in the nineteenth century in particular such that the pattern in the former was replicated in the latter despite their radically different settings. Thus Old Testament narrative, prophecy, poetry, and teaching could provide an explanation of present-day affairs and a guide for present-day action.

This way of understanding and using the Old Testament was by no means novel, of course—it is as old as Christianity itself.⁷⁸ However, several factors made typological Old Testament interpretation decisively impactful on Mansfield French individually. First, the Old Testament provided French with a framework to understand and justify his vocation in life—“the Lord has called me and sent me as his prophets of old.” At all times French had a mission from God, and he was either obedient to it or distracted from it. If he was faithful to it, he could be sure that the Almighty God was on his side, so no amount of opposition could possibly dissuade him from it or defeat him in it. Second, the Old Testament provided a rich metaphor for the substance of French’s work: it was warfare—as quoted above, “I am not *warring* on my own charges or responsibility” (emphasis mine). Third, the Old Testament, combined with a heavy dose of American democratic ideology, informed what he was fighting for: freedom for those in bondage. Fourth, the nature of Old Testament typology in general and the themes of

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Luke 24, Acts 1-2.

warfare and freedom from bondage in particular furnished French's mind with architecture by which to define what a modern individual or group was and to describe how individuals and groups were related to each other. Fifth, the Old Testament contained a treasure of images that made sense of *journey*, the path taken over time by an individual or group from a degraded starting point to a glorious destiny with many trials and deliverances in between.

Sixth and most importantly, although French surely knew *that* the Old Testament shaped his viewpoint, he may well have been completely unaware of *how* it did. There remains not a shred of reflection in French's hand about what principles guided his typological associations and why they were valid, about what kept them bound to reality and God's genuine revelatory intent so as not to become a human's self-justifying flight of fancy. The whole process seems to have been entirely unconscious: French opened the Bible, read it, recognized what looked like a parallel to his immediate experience or observation, more or less ignored literary, historical, and theological context, concluded that *A* equals *B*, and lived out the logical application. The unconsciousness of the procedure is critical, because if typological associations formed in French's mind without him knowing it, then associations could also *shift* without him knowing it. Specifically, although the Old Testament pattern of warfare for the sake of freeing the captives looked like one thing in the 1840s, it could look very different in the 1850s and still more different in the 1860s.⁷⁹ French could glide from one interpretation to the next remaining confident all the while that he knew and was obeying the will of God as he always did,

⁷⁹ See pp. 172-80, 280-96.

probably unaware that his mind was changing. This could be called the marriage of Christian typology and Common Sense Realism, and it had spectacular consequences in the career of Mansfield French.

In the 1840s French typologically used Old Testament imagery to understand and describe his ministry to save and sanctify souls. He was by no means unique in this, especially at camp meetings. Methodists had long used biblical typology to conceive of and justify the camp meeting location and configuration and their activity there. For example, they compared the experience of involuntary falling in the presence of the Lord with the “slain” in Ezekiel’s prophecy in Ezekiel 21, and they compared shouting and dancing in the camp with David bringing the ark to Jerusalem. These uses of Scripture and others stemmed from an identification of various biblical stories and images in which the presence of God dwelt among his people, especially the saga of Israel camping in the wilderness on their way to the promised land.⁸⁰

The primary typological construct that French employed was that of warfare. In this association, French and his fellow preachers and exhorters filled the role of mighty Israelite warriors. The unconverted who were present in the meeting were “the wicked”—that is, Israel’s enemies, the surrounding Gentile nations such as the Philistines. The preaching event was the battle. The text of Scripture that served as the basis of the preaching was the weapon in the hand of the Lord’s warrior. When French called for mourners seeking salvation to come to the “altar” (preaching platform) at the conclusion of his message, those who had been made afraid for their spiritual condition because of

⁸⁰ Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 108-17.

their unforgiven sins were considered “wounded” in the battle. The term “slain” sometimes referred to those who physically fell down. Other times it meant those who, as a result of being “wounded” over their sins, “died” to their sinful life, which allowed them to be raised to a new spiritual birth in Christ with hope for eternal life beyond the earthly grave. (This final element of the parallel was a thoroughgoing New Testament metaphor.⁸¹) Of course, someone could be “slain” in both senses at once. The metaphor applied to the place of ministry also; one revival location French referred to simply as “Battleground.”⁸²

The following are examples of the battle metaphor in Mansfield French’s words, with explanation and Scripture references to biblical allusions in brackets:

Our great Captain [i.e., Jesus] is still working most gloriously. Many are the slain of the Lord [i.e., many have been converted]. . . . The solemnity of a graveyard pervaded the minds of the wicked [i.e., those still unconverted]. . . .

Jesus reigns & every victory but adds new joys to [*damage*] hearts & glory to his name. I must now leave till after the evening meeting. And O how dark. What are [the?] weapons I shall use this afternoon [i.e., what texts will I preach]? O blessed be God. I love to use those of his own solution. Then while I go and ask him, let him give, & I will use, whether it be David’s sling [1 Samuel 17:40, 49-50], Samson’s jawbone [Judges 15:15-17] or Shamgar’s oxgoad [Judges 3:31], or I be commissioned to hew, (Samuel like), Agag in pieces in Gilgal [1 Samuel 15:32-33]. I never saw before as I do now the beauty of these strange [*damage*] is *meaning* in them. . . . The Lord employed this poor worm to thresh mountains [Isaiah 41:15]. I asked & he gave me Luke 16:27, 28 [to preach]. The truth was mighty. I had great liberty. Eleven mourners were at the altar—4 or 5 converted—2 powerfully & shouted the praises of their savior. With the conversions that we think there will be tomorrow, I presume we shall number about 40. Praise the

⁸¹ See, e.g., Romans 6:1-11.

⁸² M. French to A. French, date unknown (1849-50), FFP. French was not the only Methodist preacher to employ this martial typology. Circuit riders Shadrach Bostwick, Maxwell P. Gaddis, and likely many others did as well. Notably, Bostwick and Gaddis both served in Ohio, and Gaddis was instrumental in the revival in Circleville that drew in Austa French. See Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 160-61; p. 112 above.

Lord for all this—O 'tis marvellous in the eyes of all [Psalm 118:23]. We expect about a score of friends to be with us tomorrow & to wind up the meeting. We shall invite the mourners & young converts to go over to Mt. Zion, which is only 4 or 5 miles. By carrying so much fire & zeal & so many young Samsons we hope to set the Philistines' corn on fire without the foxes [Judges 15:4-5].⁸³

Here I am in the midst of a severe battle with the King of Zion. I am like Jonathan amidst the Philistines without his armor bearer however [1 Samuel 14:1-15]. . . . One hour intermission, all brought dinners, took a piece & went at the battle, preached again. My silver trumpet [Numbers 10:1-10] had become as hoarse as a ram's horn [Joshua 6:1-14], but glory be to God, the young converts from Mariotts like Gideon's lamps & pitchers began to break & shine [Judges 7:15-22], the hosts gave way & many fell down dead at the altar. The battle lasted about 4 hours & half. I never worked so hard in my life, no help whatever, ministerial I mean. My soul was full. Several were converted & blessed. The brethren like Caleb & Joshua are now coming in to Marshall to go up & possess the goodly land [Numbers 13:30; 14:6-9]. . . .

Last evening the very heavens & earth seemed to meet. The Lord put an oxgoad into his Shamgar's hands, cut from Hosea 13:9. The Philistines were truly beat out & many to death. Twenty fell down wounded at the altar. Some 7 or 8 died to sin and were made alive to God [Romans 6:11]—I never saw a more solemn & interesting time. . . . Several mourners were converted on their feet. Some of the brethren rec[eive]d the blessing of perfect love, confessing it. Many fell to the floor—all felt the power—The baptism & shouting at the camp meeting 2 yrs ago was not so interesting as this scene. It beggars all description. O beautiful for situation is Mt. Zion. It is becoming the joy of many souls [Psalm 48:2, a play on words with the name of the church]. At the close I read in their ears Joel II.21, 23, 26-29 & 32. Truly this day was this scripture fulfilled [cf. Acts 2:14-21]. The wicked of all description tremble as in the day of slaughter [Jeremiah 12:3; James 5:5]. The daughters of Zion [i.e., converted women] are now pouring into the courts of the Lord [Psalm 84:2] to pay their vows & to offer their sacrifices [Psalm 50:14; 66:13; Jonah 2:9; probably referring to a time of prayer around the platform to kick off the next meeting]. . . .⁸⁴

Old Testament geography and the exodus and wilderness journey narratives were valuable to French in another way in that they helped him to make sense of his personal “pilgrim's progress” of spiritual experience:

⁸³ M. French to A. French, June 11, 1846, FFP.

⁸⁴ M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP.

I stand on ground, as touching my faith—that I never have occupied before. I have not found where I am. I am not in Baca's vale [Psalm 84:6; the name may mean "weeping"⁸⁵], nor on Pisgah top [the peak from which Moses viewed the promised land just before his death, Deuteronomy 34:1-4; French seems to mean the utmost spiritual exhilaration that one can experience before reaching heaven]. Every engagement with the enemy commences, with the utmost uncertainty as to the result so that I can scarcely say I fight by faith, & yet victory crowns every onset. I never have experienced the like before—I do not seem to be impelled by an energetic faith, but to feel weakness such as I have hitherto been a stranger to. I rejoice in it tho' 'tis a new and strange trial, for it adds to my experience & makes me to see new displays of God's salvation. And O how new and varied were the different exhibitions of God's salvation to the Jews. Now led forth by a strong hand (at the termination of the plagues) from Egyptian bondage [Exodus 13:9]. Next a sea opens before them. And here, seems to me I am about [to] get a little light as to my present state. They had the fire pillar already, which, tho' it lighted their path by land, did not show to their dim eyes, beclouded by doubts, & unbelief, a path way in the sea [13:21-14:31]. O glory be to God, how like the water from the rock [17:6], light bursts, upon my situation. I was going on to speak further of their varied salvation, such as the manna [ch. 16], the rock, the crossing of Jordan & the fall of Jericho [Joshua 3-6] &c. &c. which it seems the Lord multiplied, lest by their being compelled to both see & reflect upon *one* salvation, their joys from their deliverance, should grow stale like the manna [Exodus 16:19-20]. O hallelujah *Glory, Glory, Glory*, I say *Glory*, let your *soul* echo it back—*Glory, Amen.*"⁸⁶

In the foregoing excerpt French considers life as a journey through the wilderness from slavery to freedom and rest in the good land. Along the way there are low points of deep grief where hope is almost lost and high points of sheer ecstasy in God. The wilderness journey is also the place of trials, the path on which one's supplies run out, enemies draw near, and strength fails. But these are tests intended by God to prove and develop the believer's faith in him in the darkest moments. They also serve as repeated opportunities to see God intervene to rescue and provide. The believer's path to heaven,

⁸⁵ Chad Brand, et al., gen. eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), s.v. "Baca."

⁸⁶ M. French to A. French, June 11, 1846, FFP.

then, is a roller coaster of highs and lows in which one can count on both frequent perilous crises and equally frequent deliverances from danger and want into safety and plenty.

This conception of the Christian's life with God powerfully reinforced French to continue in his mission no matter how difficult circumstances became. At this time the hardships were financial and material to a degree that the son of Joshua French had probably never faced in his life. Yet he refused give up his calling for something easier. He was sure that God would provide and rescue his family in the nick of time as he did for Israel long before. Moreover, rewards were already present for the gathering, and a greater reward was coming:

Twice thro' dreams I have been tempted—& Glory to God twice I resisted the devil. In the first he presented before me a lucrative situation at the same time contrasting our present situation. I met him with "Better is a *little* that the righteous hath than the *riches* of many wicked" [Psalm 37:16; Proverbs 16:8]. I turned with holy triumph from the offer, to sing, "How happy is the pilgrim's lot." Yes, O Glory be to God. "Yonder is our house & portion fair." I again dreamed that my family was in deep affliction, and on awaking, the devil tried to persuade me to go home & see. I again conquered. That morning the camp resounded with the shouts of newborn king.⁸⁷

Today we are gathering spoils. O glory, glory. When have I seen such a day as this? O what are thrones, crowns, dominions, or *worlds* to the ground I occupy, the riches & honors, my Jesus gives me. O my dear wife, amidst your want, fatigue, privations, lift up your voice & cry hallelujah to the lamb [Revelation 19:1-9]. Praise & honor to our God. Your suffering time will soon be over. O the jewels, the jewels in the crown of our rejoicing, in the great day. O the glory that awaits. The trials & hardships of our present life & warfare are all swallowed up in anticipation of the glory that shall be revealed [Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 5:4] & shouts of the souls born into the kingdom & to be crowned with eternal life, as we receive ours. O praise, endless praise to God & the Lamb [Revelation

⁸⁷ M. French to A. French, June 11, 1846, FFP.

Methodist Preacher

On August 19, 1845, Mansfield French was received on trial into the traveling connection of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁸⁹ Both the words “traveling” and “trial” require definition. Beginning with the Wesleys themselves Methodist preachers were always on the move proclaiming the gospel wherever there were people who needed to hear it. As the organization of bands and classes grew, itinerancy was built into the Methodist structure. In the United States, as French’s contemporary Bishop Matthew Simpson later described it, “[w]here individual Churches or Societies” (more or less interchangeable terms) “are not sufficiently strong for the support of the minister, several are united together, constituting what is termed a ‘circuit,’ which the minister visits in regular order, dividing his labors among them.” As the number of Methodists in an area grew, the circuits shortened in length with fewer stops where more people gathered to hear the preacher. Eventually “each appointment becomes a separate and self-sustaining congregation, and is usually called a ‘station.’”⁹⁰ When French became a traveling minister, Ohio was dominated by circuits centered in small towns; the circuits wheeled outward to encompass the preaching points and classes located in the surrounding countryside. The well-settled state no longer had vast circuits of hundreds of miles that typified the frontier, yet self-supporting stations were more or

⁸⁸ M. French to A. French, June 15, 1846, FFP.

⁸⁹ Journal of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1840-1846, p. 136, Archives of Ohio United Methodism, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH.

⁹⁰ Simpson, *Hundred Years of Methodism*, 214.

less restricted to a few large cities, principally Cincinnati.

The term “on trial” refers to a probationary period served by new traveling ministers. After the district voted to recommend the candidate at its Quarterly Meeting, the Annual Conference of which the district was a part appointed him to a circuit as a probationary itinerant. If things went well for the next two years, the conference admitted the candidate into “full connection” and ordained him a traveling deacon. The deacon was a minister in every respect except that he could not serve communion on his own. After two years as a deacon the minister was promoted to traveling elder and then could administer the sacrament.⁹¹

As a Methodist preacher, French was enjoined to “mind every point, great and small,” in the *Discipline*, the Methodist manual for doctrine, conduct, and organization. The *Discipline* of 1844 was tersely clear about “the duty of a preacher.” First was simply “To preach,” which always included a heavy dose of sermons designed to bring about conversions. Indeed, the regular occurrence of conversions was viewed as an essential marker of adequate preaching. Second was “To meet the societies, classes, and general bands,” the backbone of the Methodist system and the guarantor of growth toward perfection and maintenance of good conduct among members. This involved appointing and carefully watching over leaders and local preachers to support them and correct them as well as administering discipline toward members who violated the Bible’s and the church’s standard of behavior. This duty also encompassed overseeing Sunday (or “Sabbath”) Schools as the new method for ensuring the Christian formation of the young.

⁹¹ Carol Holliger, “Road to Becoming Travelling Elder 1844,” unpublished diagram with personal communication, Delaware, OH, August 6, 2012; *Doctrines and Discipline*, 33-35, 40-43.

Implicit in the second duty was “visiting from house to house” at regular intervals, by which a pastor could inquire of families about their spiritual (including emotional and relational) condition and give counsel on how to improve it. Home visitation was also implicit in the third duty, “To visit the sick.” Finally, for good measure, the fourth duty of a Methodist preacher was “To preach” again—specifically “in the morning, where he can get hearers. We recommend morning preaching at five o’clock in the summer, and six in the winter, wherever it is practicable.” One ministerial task that the *Discipline* did not spell out but that ministers worked at in increasing measure in French’s era consisted of forming, fostering, and fundraising for voluntary benevolent societies for missions purposes and social improvement.⁹²

The *Discipline* also delineated in two small, pithy pages an imposing standard for how the preacher was to conduct his ministry:

1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed: never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.
2. Be serious. Let your motto be, *Holiness to the Lord*. Avoid all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking.
3. Converse sparingly, and conduct yourself prudently with women. . . .
4. Take no step toward marriage without first consulting with your brethren.
5. Believe evil of no one without good evidence. . . . Put the best construction on everything. . . .

⁹² *Doctrines and Discipline*, 38-40, 43; Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 104-8. The *Discipline* advised ministers concisely on how to preach effectively; what questions members ought to ask each other in meetings to foster spiritual growth and accountability; how to visit house to house for the purpose of improving members’ day-to-day faith and behavior; how to administer Sunday Schools; how to make profitable use of private time; how to conduct public worship; how to ensure good congregational singing; how to examine and improve class leaders; and how to try and expel members for bad conduct (50-65, 78-80, 86-90, 94-98). It also laid out the standard of moral conduct, good works, and spiritual practice to be adhered to by members of Methodist classes (82-85, 90-92, 94).

6. Speak evil of no one. . . . Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you come to the person concerned.
7. Tell every one under your care what you think wrong in his conduct and temper, and that lovingly and plainly as soon as may be: else it will fester in your heart. . . .
8. Avoid all affectation. A preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all.
9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin.
10. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. . . .
11. You have nothing to do but to save souls; therefore spend and be spent in this work; and go always not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most. . . .
12. Act in all things not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel. As such, it is your duty to employ your time in the manner which we direct: in preaching, and visiting from house to house; in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labour with us in the Lord's vineyard, it is needful you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory.

These directions included the bracing command, "Observe! it is not your business only to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many as you can; to bring as many sinners as you can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord."⁹³

In antebellum American society, the influence of clergy was immense. Although few individual clergymen had much power beyond their local area, within their localities and as a whole this class of well-educated—or at least better educated than the average person—dedicated professionals, held to such austere standards as described in the Methodist *Discipline*, carried greater respect among laypeople and even unbelievers than perhaps at any other time in the nation's history. E. Brooks Holifield observes that

⁹³ *Doctrines and Discipline*, 38-40.

their preaching gave them a larger public audience of adults, week after week, than that of any other professional group. Their pastoral care of individuals—in a society without therapists or social workers—offered them more intimate access to other people’s lives than any other profession enjoyed. Their leadership of congregations that had become more internally complex gave them a special expertise in a society that was beginning to turn toward voluntary organization to attain many of its aims. And their leadership in reform and social movements gave them public influence.⁹⁴

French was accustomed to respect as one of the most learned men in Circleville (along with the clergy, that is), but now, even as his material life tumbled, his power to make a difference for good rose considerably.

French’s first charge was Martinsburg, one of the largest circuits in membership in the North Ohio Conference, located in the Mount Vernon District. No other circuit had more Sunday Schools, “scholars” (i.e., students), teachers, or superintendents. French’s assignment to this circuit was suitable because it was large enough for the traveling elder, a Reverend H. Whiteman, to require an assistant, and that way French could be watched while he was “on trial.” In addition, since education was French’s business, he would seem to have been well-suited to oversee the huge Sunday School program. The Frenches made their home in the vicinity of Homer, ten miles west of Martinsburg, where his older brother Hiram and then his father Joshua had relocated from Vermont. It was while French served this post that he conducted the intense camp meeting at Mariotts and Mt. Zion.⁹⁵

From 1804 to 1864 Methodist traveling ministers were not permitted to remain at

⁹⁴ Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 109-10.

⁹⁵ Journal of the North Ohio Conference, 121, AOUM; “Brief Minutes of the North Ohio Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from 1840 to 1849,” 19, Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1840-49, 1850-60, AOUM; Eliza French Taylor, “Biography of Rev. Mansfield French,” 3F21-020-023, FFP.

the same post for more than two years in a row. In most cases in the North Ohio Conference in the 1840s, traveling preachers were moved every year. French was continued on trial at the conference of 1846 and assigned to the Frederick Circuit (present-day Fredericktown), an average-sized circuit under the supervision of the Reverend J. Scoles. That year the number of white members in Frederick grew from 467 to 628, and the Sunday School program experienced a roughly fifty percent increase.⁹⁶ In 1847, after examination, French was accepted into “full connexion” and ordained a traveling deacon; that year he was assigned to the Amity Circuit and served with S. C. Parker. While at Amity Austa opened a short-run academy for local youths on Mary Lyon’s educational model to supplement Mansfield’s meager income.⁹⁷ French’s first assignment on his own came in 1848, when he was assigned to the moderately small Mount Vernon Circuit. The circuit did not grow in numbers that year, and perhaps that is why French was not promoted to the rank of traveling elder the first year he was eligible. Instead in 1849, still a deacon, French was assigned to work with Scoles again, this time at Chesterville, a numerically large circuit in the Delaware District.⁹⁸

However, shortly after French’s appointment on August 1 a strange series of events led French into a different sort of ministry. On September 14 the faculty of Ohio Wesleyan University—the Methodists’ seven-year-old school in Delaware, Ohio, about

⁹⁶ Simpson, *Hundred Years of Methodism*, 218-19; Journal of the North Ohio Conference, 148, 179, AOUM; “Brief Minutes . . . 1840 to 1849,” 21, AOUM; North Ohio Records/Journals 1847-1863, 4, AOUM.

⁹⁷ North Ohio Records/Journals, 2, AOUM; “Brief Minutes . . . 1840 to 1849,” 24, AOUM; “Extracts,” Genealogical Notebook No. 3, 75, FFP.

⁹⁸ “Brief Minutes . . . 1840 to 1849,” AOUM; “Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held at Findlay, August 1, 1849,” 4-5, 10, Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, AOUM.

thirty miles north of Columbus—recommended candidates to fill the vacant post of Preparatory School principal.⁹⁹ Mansfield French, who in the previous academic year had served as one of the college’s examiners, allowed himself to be considered for the position and was eventually chosen by the Board of Trustees. Around the same time, however, he bought the Methodist church building in Chesterville for three hundred fifty dollars, allowing the church to continue to use the building while Austa operated a new school there on the off-hours. French may have gotten nervous that if he kept waiting for the position at the college but was ultimately not chosen, he would have missed the window to start a school whose income the family desperately needed. Thus he gave up on the Ohio Wesleyan post for security in Chesterville.¹⁰⁰

Rumor floated to Delaware that French was not coming to Ohio Wesleyan after all. John Quigley, French’s former presiding elder in the Mount Vernon District, wrote to French expressing the board’s grave disappointment at being left in the lurch—other candidates for the position were by now otherwise engaged and the school had considerable difficulty filling the position. Quigley urged French to reconsider, contending that there was a seminary building to be had in Delaware if he wanted it for Austa to start a school there. Yet French did not leave Chesterville. Edward Thomson, then the rising-star president of Ohio Wesleyan, admonished his good friend French

⁹⁹ For the founding and early years of Ohio Wesleyan University, see Sweet, *Methodism*, 212-13, 222-23; John Marshall Barker, *History of Ohio Methodism: A Study in Social Science* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1898), 242-45.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the Ohio Wesleyan University Faculty, September 14, 1849, October 20, 1849, November 5, 1849, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH; Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, manuscript version, 44, AOUM; *History of Morrow County and Ohio* (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1880), 368; “Extracts from ‘Reminiscences of Eliza Minerva French Taylor,’ ” Genealogical Notebook No. 3, 75, FFP; George Lansing Taylor, “Austa French: A Biographical Sketch,” 7, FFP.

twenty years later that French had “made a great mistake” by turning down the college’s offer, and French agreed. Did French retrospectively admit that he erred because of the damage he did to the university, because he missed a good opportunity, or both?¹⁰¹

Whatever the answer, French approached the Ohio Wesleyan faculty on February 26, 1850 to propose that he be appointed an agent on behalf of the university to raise funds for the buildings it desperately needed, including a chapel.¹⁰² French’s motives are obscure. Perhaps his offer was an attempt to make amends to the university. Maybe he was tiring of the circuit rider’s routine of the previous four and a half years. He probably had some altruistic sympathy toward the young college as well. However, French may also have glimpsed an opportunity to leverage a skill he gained at Granville¹⁰³ into a wider field of ministry than the Methodist system typically allowed.

Antebellum colleges, universities, and theological seminaries were frequently associated with well-known traveling evangelists who raised money for the schools to train disciples who would extend the evangelist’s work. This could work in two directions, however: not only could popular evangelists raise money for colleges, but college fundraisers could become popular evangelists. Accordingly, Mansfield French joined two other Ohio Wesleyan agents who, with the state divided among them, itinerated to win support for the school. The process was simple. The agent would go on tour, preaching from church to church in Ohio’s Methodist conferences, saving souls,

¹⁰¹ John Quigley to M. French, October 2, 1849, FFP; M. French to A. French, September 18, 1869, FFP. For a synopsis of Edward Thomson’s career see Barker, *History of Ohio Methodism*, 253.

¹⁰² Minutes of the Ohio Wesleyan University Faculty, February 26, 1850.

¹⁰³ See pp. 78-79.

bringing believers to perfection, and bringing fresh fire into the Methodist societies. He would also promote Ohio Wesleyan, alert Methodists to its need, and visit potential donors in their homes to win a subscribed pledge. The agent got paid a commission on the subscriptions he garnered.¹⁰⁴

The university accepted French's offer, and he began work in 1850; that summer the North Ohio Conference finally ordained him a traveling elder and formally appointed him to the assignment. However, in the fall French's health gave out, and he was laid up with "nervous prostration," a nineteenth-century term synonymous with "neurasthenia" or "nervous breakdown," "[a] term previously used for persons with unexplained chronic fatigue and lassitude. Accompanying these symptoms were usually nervousness, irritability, anxiety, depression, headache, insomnia, and sexual disorders." The major adjustments that came with leaving the seminary for the ministry; five years of physical and mental stress riding the circuit, being away from home, caring for souls, and trying to keep his now seven-member family fed; and the new, continual pressure to secure donations in order to earn a commission and survive finally crushed French. He was unable to function normally for fifteen months.¹⁰⁵ In July 1851 the conference declared French a supernumerary preacher, a designation that allowed him to continue to collect a traveling minister's salary as he recovered while his two fellow agents tried to pick up the

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 58; Barker, *History of Ohio Methodism*, 249-50.

¹⁰⁵ "Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held at Medina, August 7th, 1850," 4, Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, AOUM; E. F. Taylor, "Biography," FFP; Clayton L. Thomas, ed., *Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, 18th ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co., 1997), s.vv. "nervous prostration," "neurasthenia." In addition to Eliza, Winchell, and Mansfield Joshua, Grace Ruth French was born in June 1845 in Homer, Ohio. Laura Adorna French was born in May 1846 and died in July 1847. Hamline Quigley French was born on June 7, 1850 in Chesterville. See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 125.

slack. French was required to minister as his health allowed him in Delaware, where the family moved that year. French was good at preaching and loved it, and he always did an adequate job raising money as an agent, but forever after, whenever he performed that sort of work, depression lurked close behind.¹⁰⁶

Fortunately, in the winter of 1851-52 French finally recovered his strength and poise well enough to go back on the road for the college, which in his case meant spending a good deal of time in Cincinnati, the sixth largest city in the nation in 1850 and the only one west of the Appalachians with a population of more than one hundred thousand.¹⁰⁷ When French came to town, old-fashioned, rural Methodism collided with sophisticated, urban Methodism at full force, and sparks flew.

In February French began making his rounds through Cincinnati's Methodist churches, preaching morning, noon, and evening in different locations and giving a break to the regular pastors. Topics included "Holiness," of course, and Scripture texts especially pointed at the more affluent members of the audience such as, "For it is the Lord that giveth thee power to get wealth."¹⁰⁸ French's charisma in the pulpit engendered sympathy toward Ohio Wesleyan, and subscriptions started flowing in.¹⁰⁹

The breakthrough came at Wesley Chapel, where French and a fellow minister

¹⁰⁶ "Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held at Bellefontaine, Ohio, July 30th, 1851," 6, 15, Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, AOUM; *Doctrines and Discipline*, 67, 166; E. F. Taylor, "Biography," FFP.

¹⁰⁷ "Population of 100 Largest Urban Places: 1850," U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab08.txt>, released June 15, 1998 (accessed June 11, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Deuteronomy 8:18, altered by French.

¹⁰⁹ M. French to A. French, February 23, 1852.

named Mitchell began conducting a protracted meeting. Whether it was planned or was an impromptu outgrowth of a single meeting is unclear, but it is clear that once the meeting got going it ran in a direction that the buttoned-down church did not expect. French and Mitchell preached vigorously and reimported shouting into the proceedings, which had become thoroughly unfamiliar in Wesley Chapel. At least one morning service did not close until five o'clock in the evening. The leaders of the church labeled French a "monomaniac"—presumably because of his fixation on holiness—and worriedly deliberated when to cut the preachers off and order the protracted meeting to a close. In this "fight" and "combat," local Methodist leadership was "the enemy"! Yet the revival at Wesley continued for days more. On March 11, against expected opposition, French and Mitchell introduced "bread breaking." (This was not a full-blown sacramental "love feast," which took place two weeks later, and celebrating communion should not have been unusual, so it is unknown why French anticipated opposition; perhaps the timing went against normal procedure.) That night

[a] heavenly sweetness pervaded all hearts. . . . Melting power attended the word. At the close all who would be the Lord's were invited around the altar. They *flocked*, they *crowded* around. What a time. I led in prayer of consecration. The Pentecostal shower followed. They were watered from on high. A flood of light & glory was let down. Love was poured down in *torrents*. We arose to our feet, such as *could*. I proposed the giving the hand to each other, as a token of our love & a pledge that we would be the Lord's. You must imagine what was the scene that followed. Such *shouting*, *weeping*, *embracing*, praising, crying glory, Glory, Hallelujah, as *Old Wesley* has not seen for years.

French was enraptured. "All day . . . I was lost in God. Walking in the effulgence of God's glory as it shone in the face of Jesus Christ, and shed its radiant, mellow light all

around.”¹¹⁰

Word of the Wesley Chapel revival went out through the whole city, and Methodists, including ministers, began streaming in from other churches to seek the blessing of perfect love. The “horrible persecution I have passed thro’, and that not from the world, but from the professed followers of Christ,” finally gave way:

On Monday night, was held the greatest love feast in Wesley witnessed there for ten years and some say ever held in the city. About 30 witnesses, *bold, strong, clear, intelligent* and apparently *confirmed*, rose in quick succession and witnessed to the power of Christ to save from all sin. The Spirit led the meeting. O it was such a feast as the hungry souls have enjoyed. A remarkable freedom, pervaded the house, long, loud and continued shouting, & sometimes shaking of hands added to the interest.¹¹¹

French went back to Cincinnati repeatedly in 1852, and his mission to fully fund Ohio Wesleyan’s endowment and a professorship flourished. The power of the Wesley Chapel revival validated his ministry and his cause and warmed wealthy Methodists to the prospect of donating to the college. One obstacle that he encountered was the sorry state of financial affairs of the Ohio Female College, a local Methodist institution that drew Cincinnati Methodists’ sympathy. French overcame this objection by temporarily serving as an agent of that school also, which won him enough goodwill among the locals to garner abundant donations toward both. French could now breathe much easier about providing for his household and paying off his debts. He was able to send money home only sparingly, but he was able to buy in Cincinnati and ship to Delaware the supplies and furnishings necessary to appoint a middle-class home properly. While he was away,

¹¹⁰ M. French to A. French, March 9, 1852, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 12, 1852, FFP.

¹¹¹ M. French to A. French, March 12, 1852, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 24, 1852, FFP.

Austa managed the miniature farm of the type kept by homes in town, keeping a cow and chickens and planting corn, potatoes, and the like. Fourteen-year-old son Winchell bore much of the responsibility for these tasks as well as minding the upkeep of the house, fence, and property.¹¹²

In the winter of 1852-53 eldest child Eliza joined her father in Cincinnati and began attending Ohio Female College. French launched outward into the surrounding area, especially up the Great Miami River, which was well populated by wealthy farmers. He looked not only to collect some of the farmers' wealth for the college but also to attack a major component of its source—the sale of excess corn to whiskey distillers. French reaped a bountiful harvest in conversions and sanctifications—in Cleves, Ohio, for example, he preached ten straight days, twice a day—but his agency did not go as well as the year before. The board and faculty in Delaware knew this and were increasingly worried; the lack of a revival at the college, which had become an accustomed annual occurrence, worsened their anxiety. French felt the pressure and began sliding toward depression again. “My constant prayer has been, ‘O Lord revive thy work,’ ” he wrote Austa from a budding revival in Greenfield. “*I feel badly, deeply depressed* and can hardly tell why. I am working so much against a wall of brass. So little *fruit*, pecuniary fruit attends my labors. And yet spiritual fruit is made *greatly to abound*. Well God may bring the right fruit from my labors after a while.” By February donations finally started trickling in behind the bevy of saved and sanctified souls.¹¹³

¹¹² M. French to A. French, 1852 *passim*, FFP.

¹¹³ M. French to A. French, December 1852 to March 1853, *passim*, FFP, quotation from January 24; Mansfield French, *The Lord and the Distillers. Who Got the Corn?* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, n.d.).

The ensuing months continued to be a struggle, however, and under the stress French's anxiety and depression worsened. At the North Ohio Annual Conference in August 1853 French asked to be granted supernumerary status again. The Conference voted to deny his request, but rather than send him out as an agent once again it reassigned him back to circuit riding, this time in Mount Gilead. French refused to go, a bold violation of the command in the *Discipline* to "do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for [God's] glory." Though debilitated by his nerves, he had to find an income some other way, which could not have made his mental state any easier.¹¹⁴

Most of French's activity between the 1853 and 1854 conferences is obscure. The first evidence of him is in letters he wrote home from Cincinnati in February 1854, where he was introduced to Methodist evangelist James Caughey, an Irish-American who barnstormed the United States, Canada, and the British Isles preaching holiness to nearly as much acclaim as Walter and Phoebe Palmer. In the late winter of 1854 Caughey was applying himself to stir revival in Cincinnati at the same time that a perfectionistic Reformed Presbyterian, Spencer L. Finney, was at it among the city's Calvinists. French was awed and delighted by the power Caughey exhibited to call sinners to repentance and believers to holiness. Caughey, for his part, found a kindred spirit in Mansfield French and began enlisting the latter to assist him by praying and preaching at his revival services. French, who was struggling to recover from his nervous breakdown, showed

¹¹⁴ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 125; "Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held at Mount Vernon, August 24-31, A.D. 1853," 40, 65, Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, AOUM; Minutes of the North Ohio Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, manuscript version, 190, AOUM; *Doctrines and Disciplines*, 39. The Frenches took in boarders to try to make ends meet; see M. French to E. French, February 14, 1854, FFP.

signs of renewed life:

At the close of tea, last eve, we all knelt in prayer. My soul was led out in an uncommon degree, so much so that Br. P[faff] was almost alarmed. Br. Caughey was greatly strengthened & I rec^d such a blessing—thrilling, body & soul as could scarcely be described. My whole nervous system like the cripple's ankle bones, experienced a loosening & bracing, so that I could indeed praise God [Acts 3:7-8]! I feel like another man. Praise God for it all.

However, bursts of vitality alternated with recurrences of weakness and gloom:

O how tedious to be away, how hard to endure, to have no abiding home, to be a wanderer with poor health. It comes over once in a while like a *deathchill*. And my heart feels as if it would break. How I long for sweet, tranquil, pleasant home scenes & delights & how are they buried—O Lord, why is it so? O pray much for me. I feel so lonely.¹¹⁵

Caughey was convinced of French's giftedness and urged him to go forth as a freelance evangelist like he did. Other friends agreed and suggested that the opportune field was further west. Caughey was heading to Bloomington, Illinois after wrapping up his work at Christie Chapel in Cincinnati, and French decided to go with him. To earn an income while traveling with Caughey, French apparently took on an agency for a "boarding House," presumably on behalf of an unidentified educational institution, perhaps Ohio Female College. French left Cincinnati on April 6 with his health still in flux. Unfortunately, in Illinois he was broken once again. Caughey's ministry continued to buoy him; he was elated both by the dozens of newly saved and sanctified souls and by the Holy Spirit's awesome presence in the meetings. But his agency was a failure, and he was tormented with longing for his family. Desperate and lonely, French wrote a heart-rending letter to Austa that he thought would be his last:

¹¹⁵ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 118; Mansfield French, "Brother Caughey," FFP; M. French to A. French, February-April 1854, *passim*, FFP, quotes from March 24 and 28, 1854.

I shall hasten home from Bloomington as soon as possible, as I must sell off something to pay our debts. I see no prospect of earning anything this summer. My boarding House agency will amount, I fear to nothing, as my nerves will not yet bear it. And no one *talks* or *feels* like giving—I feel *poor & badly, down, down* in spirits very much—I never felt so much like sitting down & having a good *cry* in my life. O how could I pass many such nights as last night. My soul is happy in the Lord. My sky is . . . clear, but such a sinking, such a giving away at the heart. O how much the kind embraces, the warm sympathies, the smiling face, of my *one*, tender, forbearing & confiding wife, would do for my poor heart & body.

Well it may be my work is about done up. The Lord does not seem to give me any more to do. He gives me much honor before all the people here, & many fountains of sympathy have open[ed] for me. O I could go up to the better land now very well, I am so little use to the children & so little comfort to you & so much trouble I cause you. I think perhaps the Lord may be about to release me. O I ask pardon for all my faults, all the grief I have caused you. O that I had been a holier man, a better father, a better husband, a better minister. If the Lord take my spirit out of this body of infirmities, it may serve my family & the church better, from in a disembodied state. O may the Lord put around you, & beneath you, his everlasting arms—O live near, *near* to Jesus. Such delight—*only* in *him*. O I have prayed much since I left for you—have felt such a union of spirit & perhaps if we meet not again till we get over the flood, it may be best. The Lord's will be done. I want to be *melted down, purified*, my *will subdued*, my *heart sanctified*, my *whole man moulded & fashioned* after *Jesus*.

Dear Br. C[aughey], carries me in his heart, leaves much upon me, crowns me with great honor before all the people & we are great mutual comforts to each other. O how rich is this feast. O how much would I give to have you here, so free from outward care as I am, to enjoy it. O I continually bear you in mind while I am thus feasting, & pray God, by his Spirit to divide my portion with your soul. O how dear you are to my heart, and now may God bless you with grace & wisdom, comfort and joy. And should we never meet here on these low grounds of sorrow may we meet in heaven—a *warm kiss* for you all & the holy breathings of my inmost soul for your *present & eternal welfare*.

*Yours in Christ forever,
Mansfield*

The dear boys, how my heart entwines around them & may they be reared up in the fear of the Lord, meet us in heaven is the prayer of their dear father. Amen & amen.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ M. French to A. French, March-April 1854, *passim*, FFP, quoted is date unknown (1854).

French's task on earth was not over yet, however. Whether or not he went directly home from Bloomington, he was still traveling throughout southwestern Ohio less than two weeks later, this time on his own. He won some donations for the unknown institution he represented and preached to as great effect as ever before. This rebound was followed by a new assignment that brought financial rescue to the French family. On May 18, 1854, the Board of Trustees of Xenia Female Seminary in Xenia, Ohio, near Dayton, elected French principal. French took the job and made plans to employ Austa and daughter Eliza as teachers. While Austa made pilgrimage to New England in July to be refreshed on the latest in educational method, Mansfield packed the house in Delaware and moved the family to Xenia.¹¹⁷

French was reunited with his family, and his stress over providing for his household was finally relieved for a while. His unsettled status in the Methodist Episcopal Church, however, may have been cause for further anxiety. One of the principal items of business at each Annual Conference was for the character of each minister to be examined and sanctioned if his behavior did not conform to the *Discipline*. At the 1854 North Ohio Conference in August, French's character did not pass at first—his refusal to serve at Mount Gilead the previous year was surely the sticking point. Yet the motion to pass his character was taken up again, and after further examination his colleagues endorsed him and asked the bishop presiding over the conference to appoint him formally to Xenia Female Seminary.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ M. French to A. French, April 21, 1854, FFP; C. L. Merrick to M. French, May 18, 1854, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 1854, *passim*, FFP.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the North Ohio Conference, manuscript version, 223, 226, AOUM.

At least ten years after leaving the principalship of a female seminary in Circleville, French was at it again in Xenia. The intervening decade of ministry had been a whirlwind of exhilaration and despondency, abundant spiritual fruit and harrowing financial want. Little did French know that his return to teaching young ladies would provide the basis for two new ministry opportunities that corresponded to two ministry objectives that took him far from Ohio and set the course of the rest of his life. These two objectives reinforced each other for about five years; later their drift apart forced choices on Mansfield and Austa French that ultimately led his ministry to a quiet close. One objective was to promote holiness, which French had been doing since 1843. The other objective gripped French with increasing force in the 1850s: to eradicate slavery in favor of racial equality and “Universal Freedom.”

French and the Old Testament: Spiritual Warfare for Slaves’ Freedom

After the dwindling of America’s visible but ineffectual antislavery movement of the Revolutionary era, abolitionism exploded onto the scene of the early 1830s through the confluence of “the rebellious spiritual stirrings of . . . particular young New Englanders and the unprecedented slavery-related crises which opened the new decade,” such as Nat Turner’s rebellion in southeastern Virginia. Distinguished from other varieties of antislavery sentiment, abolitionism was the radical “doctrine,” in the words of one abolitionist, that

[i]t is the duty of the holders of slaves to restore them to their liberty, and to extend to them the full protection of the law . . . to restore to them the profits of their labors. Also it is the *duty* of all men to proclaim this doctrine, to urge upon slaveholders *immediate emancipation*, so long as there is a slave—to agitate the

consciences of tyrants, so long as there is a tyrant on the globe.

Because emancipation was a duty, it must be done immediately. Because slavery was evil, compensation to slaveholders for emancipating their slaves rewarded evil. Because slaves deserved freedom, requiring freed slaves to be deported to colonies in Africa was a violation of freedom also.¹¹⁹

Many of the new wave of abolitionists were converted in the heat of revival in Yankee territory in the 1820s and '30s as Mansfield French and his Heath students were. Like the latter, the abolitionists were suckled on the Edwardsean ethics of universal, disinterested benevolence. Like French, they were gripped by the need to eschew all thought and action that was not of God and by the adjoining compulsion to reorient their plans toward devoting their whole lives to his service.¹²⁰ Yet unlike the young French, the abolitionists identified slavery as the most egregious impediment to the purity of individuals enmeshed in it as well as of the nation as a whole, and they fervently committed themselves to its eradication. Also unlike French, many young abolitionists quickly grew disenchanted with churches that failed to validate their revived character by doing what they could about slavery immediately. These fell away from evangelical Christianity (although still they still dallied with evangelicals when they could get a hearing among them) and pursued abolitionism as a sort of substitute religion that defined their entire lives. These mavericks not only rejected orthodox Christian creeds and ecclesial institutions; they also tended to reject or be ejected from institutions of their

¹¹⁹ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed. Eric Foner, consulting ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 43, 47.

¹²⁰ See pp. 33, 47.

own founding due to their rigorous independence of mind and principled integrity (or due to their self-righteous stubbornness, depending on how one looks at them).¹²¹

As we have seen, however, abolitionists of this mold, typified by William Lloyd Garrison, were not the whole of the abolitionist movement. The foregoing description does not fit people like Orange Scott and Arthur and Lewis Tappan or even Theodore Dwight Weld, abolitionists who never swayed from evangelical orthodoxy and who spent their lives embedded in evangelical churches and their networked institutions. However, these evangelical abolitionists did stake out particular ground within evangelicalism, which was fragmented by complex fault-lines over the issue of slavery in the 1840s and beyond.¹²²

The fundamental question for evangelicals over the issue of slavery was whether it was inherently evil or morally neutral—or, as an increasing number of Southerners asserted, inherently good, notwithstanding correctable problems that sometimes attended it. Yet the follow-up question for those who believed that slavery was basically wrong was equally important: if slavery was bad, how bad was it? In other words, how much attention ought it to demand compared with other issues? How urgent was the problem? How much was worth sacrificing in order to secure its eradication, especially from the church?

Diverse answers to these questions produced a five-way division among American

¹²¹ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 38-50; Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 6-9, 25, 33.

¹²² Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 178-224. John R. McKivigan details the complicated relationship between Garrisonian and evangelical abolitionists and between both and the churches in *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

evangelicals in the decades before the Civil War.¹²³ Some evangelical abolitionists, viewing slavery as the most pressing issue of the time, prioritized purity above all. Frustrated beyond limit with the intransigence of their denominations, believers like Orange Scott and the Wesleyan Connection opted to *come out* of the quasi-apostate churches and establish pure churches with abolitionism as an article of faith. Other evangelicals were equally aroused over slavery, and like the come-outers they wanted a church that prohibited unrepentant slaveholders, as stubborn sinners, from membership. Yet these abolitionists believed it wrong to cut ties with their churches, preferring instead to *agitate within* over the long haul until their denominations made and enforced rules that declared slavery an intolerable sin. Many more evangelicals were antislavery at heart but considered strife among Christian brothers to be a more grievous evil than slavery since it violated biblical commands toward unity and love and had the power to disrupt revivals. These evangelicals opposed conflict within the church over slavery more than they opposed slavery itself. They preferred to *wait for agreement*, expecting that in time the bulk of Southern slaveholding Christians would come around to the opinion that slavery was wrong and divest themselves of their slaves, and then discipline on the matter could reasonably commence. Still other evangelicals did not see discipline over slavery as a hoped-for result either in the present or in the future and intended that the church would *do nothing* about slavery. They believed that slavery was not a moral question, or that it was not an important question, or that the Bible was equivocal on the matter and therefore conscientious Christians could and should have the liberty to disagree about it,

¹²³ The substance of this five-fold typology is Curtis D. Johnson's (*Redeeming America*, 144-47). I have replaced his labels for the five factions with my own.

or that it was legitimate in some cases if not in all, or that it was a temporal matter that could distract the church from its proper domain of eternal concerns. Some, finally, went beyond this position and argued that slavery in general and black slavery in America in particular were biblically sound and even morally good, albeit with concerns that masters treat their slaves according to biblical precepts and acknowledging that abuses demanded correction. These raised their voices to *demand approval* of slavery, pressing their denominations to declare unambiguously that slavery was a legitimate economic and social institution and that Christians may justly be slaveowners.

It is worth noting that the same five-fold division in the church may be translated to the positions of Americans in the political realm as well. Some radicals like Garrison chose to *come out* of politics altogether as hopelessly corrupt and dreamed of a revolutionary, anarchic democracy. Others who formed the abolitionist wing of the Whig Party and who later founded the Liberty Party and the Free Soil Party sought to *agitate within* the political system for change. Other antislavery Whigs and Democrats preferred to *wait for agreement*, supporting small-bore measures to limit slavery's expansion and promote colonization so that slavery would die a natural death. Many believed that the federal government should *do nothing*, as it was unconstitutional for the government to restrict slavery in the states where it was allowed, and any attempt to do so would jeopardize the states' fragile Union. Finally, a growing number of Southerners began to *demand approval* for slavery as a positive good, also arguing that it was a basic violation of American liberties for the federal government to restrict slavery in the territories and to allow free states to dissolve the possessory right of slaveholders—and obligation of

escaped slaves—who sojourned there.

The neat parallel between the division in the church and in the body politic suggests that those who held one position in the church held the same in their political opinions. Although that certainly could and did occur, such was not always the case. For example, a Christian might take a stronger position against slavery in the church than he did in the political realm, believing that the law of God in the Bible-centered church was stricter than the constitution of the secular state and that church members should be held to a higher standard than the average American citizen.

Mansfield French also took a different position on slavery in the church than he did in the state, but in the opposite direction. In the Methodist Episcopal Church, French's stance was to *agitate within*. He entered the denomination after the Wesleyan Connection secession was complete, so he never felt the allure of joining it. At about the same time that he became a Methodist the church split North and South; with comparatively few slave-state conferences remaining the Northern church tilted increasingly heavily toward abolition in the ensuing years, so frustration over denominational stubbornness and the enticement to abandon the church for a purer body was low. At the same time, however, French was extremely disenchanted with American republicanism, and although he did not approve the full panoply of radical liberals' avant-garde social idealism, he sounded *come-out*, anarchic-utopian notes much more in tune with Garrison than even the most progressive evangelicals generally did.

It was theorized in the previous chapter that French adopted abolitionist opinions soon after the riot in Granville, Ohio in 1836 at the latest. It is telling, however, that there

is no record of French engaging in any abolitionist activity at that time or for years thereafter. It is also interesting that never French mentions politics in any of his letters of the 1830s and '40s (although admittedly few exist) despite intense and all-consuming political fervor in the country at different points in those decades. The first mention French makes of slavery in the extant written record is in 1852 after the Compromise of 1850, an aggregate of bills born out of fierce wrangling over President Zachary Taylor's bid for California to enter the Union as a free state amid bellicose threats of Southern secession and declamations from Northerners perceived as insults by Southerners. The compromise established California's statehood and staved off disunion, but it left Deep Southern "fire-eaters" and Upper Northern free-soilers profoundly disaffected. Particularly galling to Yankee idealists was the strengthened Fugitive Slave Act for returning runaways in Northern states to their Southern masters, enforced with greater strictness than ever before by the federal government. Slave recovery sometimes sparked fierce and even violent resistance from white and black abolitionists in liberal Yankee cities like Boston and Syracuse, New York; abolitionists helped targeted fugitives to escape to Canada, citing obedience to a "higher law" than that of the United States.¹²⁴ French may have held abolitionist opinions before 1850, but he *became an abolitionist* after that year. Even though he was a member of the generation of the abolitionists of the 1830s, he was not stirred into action until the Compromise of 1850 gave him the push. French's motion toward activism gathered momentum gradually but inexorably as the decade progressed.

¹²⁴ James B. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, The Oxford History of the United States, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 64-91.

French's beliefs about slavery during this period are exhibited in an unusual pair of documents that he wrote for an unusual visitor to the United States. Lajos (Louis) Kossuth was an aristocratic Hungarian with Romantic, liberal leanings who ardently defended Hungarian national identity, denounced feudalism, and championed national self-determination against the Habsburgs. He took leading roles in the run-up to an ill-fated revolution in 1848-49, during which he served as governor of Hungary. Unable to withstand the combined forces of Austria and Russia, Kossuth fled to Turkey on a quest to enlist the support of the Great Powers to intervene on Hungary's side. The Ottomans held Kossuth and the Hungarian fighters with him as virtual captives. Meanwhile pro-Hungarian sentiment was rising in the United States, and after negotiation with the Austrians and the Turks Kossuth and his comrades were permitted to be transported to the U.S. on an American warship, the *Mississippi*. Kossuth sought and gained a stop in England on the way in hopes of swaying that power, but he also realized that the United States could be a fertile source of monetary donations to the Hungarian cause and may be convinced to support it militarily. Kossuth managed to alienate the American government, but he arrived in New York to eager popular acclaim and began a tour of the nation to build grassroots sentiment to move Washington's hand in Hungary's favor.¹²⁵

French was in Cincinnati raising money for Ohio Wesleyan University when Kossuth reached the city in 1852.¹²⁶ Breast swelling with the admiration that many Americans felt for the freedom fighter—and echoing his stymied ardor for Greece in his

¹²⁵ John Komlos, *Louis Kossuth in America, 1851-52* (Buffalo: East European Institute, 1973), 13-72.

¹²⁶ Komlos, *Louis Kossuth*, 117-19.

youth¹²⁷—French composed a letter to encourage Kossuth and to retool the revolutionary’s method of prosecuting Hungary’s struggle for liberty. Two entirely different draft versions of the letter remain; we do not know which is closer to what French ultimately delivered to Kossuth. Yet taken together these drafts—by far the most philosophical of French’s writing that survives—reveal French’s conceptions of slavery, the United States, and how and why freedom was to be secured, all of which relied on his evolving interpretation of the Bible, especially the Old Testament.¹²⁸

French addressed Kossuth typologically as a “Zerubbabel” who emerged from “the land of captivity to bring forth the cap stone of this new Jerusalem” of freedom.¹²⁹ French identified him even more hopefully as “the *Moses* not of Hungary merely, but of all *God’s Freemen*, raised up not so much for the *deliverance* of *one nation*, as for the giving and expounding the Law of Righteousness & peace for all *humanity*.” French imagined that like Moses Kossuth had been driven to flee the land of bondage because of his “untimely blow” for freedom. He hoped that in the United States, a land of “gospel Liberty,” Kossuth might hear “the voice of the Great *I Am* himself from the midst of the burning bush [to] give thee thy *commission*.” Perhaps French would be that burning bush. French admonished Kossuth that his failed attempt at deliverance showed a misunderstanding of how deliverance was to be accomplished. As with Moses, Kossuth’s

¹²⁷ See p. 33.

¹²⁸ M. French to Louis Kossuth, February 10, 1852, FFP; Mansfield French, “The Independence of Hungary,” FFP. All quotations that follow are from these two documents. French describes delivering his letter to Kossuth in M. French to A. French, February 19, 1852, FFP; M. French to A. French, February 23, 1852, FFP. He shared the distaste that many Cincinnati citizens felt toward the pomp and aristocratic trappings of Kossuth’s entourage. Kossuth’s stay in the city turned out to be the beginning of the decline of his popularity in the United States. See Komlos, *Louis Kossuth*, 120.

¹²⁹ Cf. Zechariah 4, also Ezra 3-6, Haggai.

“mission is one, not of *fight*, but of *light*.”¹³⁰

Taking a bigger page out of Jonathan Edwards’ book than he does anywhere else extant,¹³¹ French introduced himself to Kossuth as “one unknown to the men of this world, but a child of adoption by the God of Love, and enjoying the *Freedom of the Universe because enjoying God*.” It is the nature of God to love, and because God created all things it is his nature to love all things. Therefore the one who has become infused with God and loves (indeed, enjoys) God must also love the entire universe. French “thank[ed] God for my *creation*, because of the *eternity* of my *being*, and of my companionship of all the beings in the universe who are good & holy,” making mention also of the “fountain of [Christ’s] blood for the purity of my spirit.” This status disposed French to hear and acknowledge the command of God to every creature: “ ‘Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’. His kingdom is *righteousness, peace & joy in the Holy Ghost*.” These references to Leviticus 19:2 and Romans 14:17 link Edwards’ ontology of God, humanity, and the universe with French’s Wesleyan passion for entire sanctification as the proper goal of every human being, attainable immediately.

Following Edwards’ pattern, French took the next step by linking holiness to ethics:

[God’s] *Law* is fulfilled in this, thou shalt love thy *neighbor as thyself* [Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:9-10]. Now it seems to me, as there is but one law, that it is the law for the *parts*, as well as the *whole*, the law for *national fractions* as well as for the *universal whole*. And no more the law for an individual in his relation to

¹³⁰ Cf. Exodus 2-4. French also addressed Kossuth’s wife as “The Miriam of Hungary, Having *drank of the cup* of your *country’s wrongs* may you have the honor of leading forth the Ladies of Hungary with the timbrel & Songs of Israel. . . .” Cf. Exodus 15:1-21.

¹³¹ Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 528-41.

another individual and to God, than for a nation in its relation to another nation & to the God of nations.

In other words, the command to be holy, exhibited by the all-encompassing duty to love one's neighbor, applies both to the universe entirely and to its constituent creatures, and not only to individual creatures but to massed fractions of creation such as political nations. Each and all—individual, collective, and total—are to be holy with the holiness of God; each and all are to love with the love of God. Simply put, “the *work* of every intelligent moral being . . . is *obedience*, and *only obedience* to this *law of love*.” In this context, the Old Testament was not only a typological resource but an ethical one.¹³²

French sums up the gift of God to the universe by the term “Universal Freedom,” which is the freedom of all to enjoy God, to be holy, and to love all being. Implicit in Universal Freedom are other freedoms as well, including freedom of political and economic self-determination. Unfortunately, “though this God, great & glorious[,] rules *over* all, he rules not *in* all.” “That old serpent, the Devil with all his hosts of Hell and allies in earth, marshals the enemies of God”—that is, all enemies “of individual and national *Freedom*, because [it is] the gift of God to man”—arming his forces with “implements of peace” converted into “swords & spears” to crush the weak and impose their will upon them. “On the other hand, Christ[,] the great captain of national & individual Freedom, because of *Universal Freedom*,” arms his followers by

breathing into [their] hearts . . . the Spirit of love whose elements are meekness, longsuffering, *forgiveness*. . . [He] seeks the conversion of [these] swords to ploughshares & these spears to pruning hooks [Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3]. The

¹³² Cf. “The One Rule of the Bible,” *BH* 11, no. 2 (February 1860): 63. For perfectionistic evangelicals’ increasing recourse to “the law of love” in moral reasoning, especially as it applied to slavery, see Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 88.

thrones of inequity established by violence, he overthrows by the power of *light & love*.

French was drawing again on the familiar metaphorical resource of biblical warfare, but he identified the typological components somewhat differently in this context than in the revivalistic meeting.¹³³ Christ was still the captain of the righteous, and the chief of his adversaries was still the devil. Yet in this setting Christ's followers were Christians who championed freedom, both Universal and derivative, and the wicked were the oppressors of the meek who longed to be free. As in revivals, the wicked opposed Christ's work, yet in the political realm God's enemies employed physical violence much more readily. In both settings, however, the power of the righteous was not a human weapon but the Holy Spirit, here exhibited by radically peaceable behavior. Christ empowered oppressed people by sanctifying them entirely. Perfect love enabled them to love their enemies; this was their means of victory over diabolical and human oppressors.¹³⁴

Notably, French's biblical vision required more than mere non-violence; it required active love toward the enemies of freedom, because loving only one's own was inconsistent with Universal Freedom and with God. "[A] *patriot's heart* . . . is circumscribed with metes and bounds, but it is . . . a *christian's heart*, which encompasses the *universe* as its *country*." A true lover of freedom was not even "a *philanthropist*," who confines his love only to humankind, but rather loves "*all orders of intelligences* both in Heaven & on Earth," visible and invisible. Therefore, true fighting for freedom was

¹³³ See pp. 142-46.

¹³⁴ Abolitionists of the 1830s strictly enjoined peaceful means also; see Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 53.

incompatible with violent uprising against oppression; it did not cohere with revolt or even revolution in the conventional sense:

The Patriot, whose love is local in its exercise, and uncircumscribed in its preferences, recognising only the *fact* of *oppression*, can seize the sword & drink the blood of the oppressor. But the *Free man* of God, breathing only *love*, because born of the God of love, & elevated far above all *sectional* preferences, which are *conflicting* because *local* in their character, to the *broad platform of universal predilections*, which are all *harmonious*, because embracing *all*, passes by the *fact of oppression* & seeks the *cause*. Finding it in the workings of sin, the fire of Hell, which is has been kindled & fanned by Satan himself, *God's freeman*, at once forgets his *own wrongs & sufferings* & seeks by weapons of *light and love* the *deliverance* of the *captor oppressor* who has been decoyed from the service of *fellowship & love*, to that which is really more *cruel* and *oppressive* to *himself*, than to his *neighbor*.

Just as in revivals defeating the wicked meant bringing about his conversion for his eternal good, so in the struggle for freedom victory meant saving the oppressor from himself. No amount of pain and injustice that he inflicted upon the oppressed was as grievous as that which he inflicted on his own soul:

'Tis Hungary's foes, Hungary's oppressors who need thy sympathy & thy prayers —. They have eyes & see not, ears have they & hear not [Jeremiah 5:21]. They are their own worst enemies, *because* the enemies of their neighbors—They are greatest slaves, who enslave others. They are injured most who injure others. Like Haman, they are building their own gallows [Esther 5:14; 7:9-10]. Like Joseph's brethren, they are purchasing their own humiliation before him they sell & enslave, when God shall send the *famine* [Genesis 37:25-28; 42:1-17].

The oppressor was to be an object of compassionate love, not violent attack; he too needed to be set free. Bloodshed, even for the cause of the oppressed, only perpetuated tyranny by inverting it; it could not liberate from it.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Cf. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 215-16. This was a substantial rebuke to Kossuth. " . . . Kossuth was [not] a warmonger *per se*. Yet . . . he did not acknowledge the possibility of a peaceful solution to Hungary's pressing needs for national survival. One finds . . . an incessantly recurring motif in Kossuth's actions: an affirmation of the need, one might almost say the glorification, of war." Komlos, *Kossuth in America*, 22-23.

Here, although he remained grounded in Old Testament law, French made an explicit disjunction between Old Testament and New Testament morality:

I am pleased to pass with you from Sinai to Calvary, from the mountain of *justice* to the mountain of *mercy*. Here, righteousness & peace kiss each other [Psalm 85:10]. The cross, it is the opening up of a new dispensation. From the cross we hear the voice of mercy, of *forgiveness*. From the cross we are taught to *put up the sword*, for they that take the sword perish with the sword [Matthew 26:52], if smitten on the one cheek to turn the other also [5:39]. He who bared his back to the smiters [Isaiah 50:6], & cried from the agonies of the Cross in behalf of his crucifiers, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” [Luke 23:34], has said to all his followers, “*Love your enemies*, bless them that curse you & *do good* to them that hate you & pray for them that spitefully use you & persecute you” [Luke 6:27-28].

French did not mean to imply that loving one’s enemies was easy or that the agony of oppression was light. To the contrary, believing the message of the cross entailed a crucifixion that often meant literal death. Nevertheless, “there must be death before *burial*, before *resurrection*.” Not just any death qualified a cause for resurrection—death in battle against tyranny did not, but a death like Jesus’ and Stephen’s¹³⁶ in which one forgave one’s murderers with one’s dying breath did. Such deaths in place of violent resistance were critical for the oppressed to attain to true freedom, individual, national, and universal. “[R]esurrection implies an agent possessed of resurrection power,” French noted. “Is this agent found in man, in a nation? O no, ’tis God himself.”

French was confident that if the Hungarians submitted to their oppressors’ violence thus, loving them by seeking their conversion instead of their destruction, God would indeed deliver Kossuth’s people. All attempts at revolution in the meantime would only delay independence. French imagined that if Hungary cooperated with God’s

¹³⁶ Acts 8:59-60.

method of securing freedom for the oppressed, then Old Testament prophecies would come true:

For Hungary, a brighter day is coming before, methinks I hear her Jeremiah rising from his Lamentations as the morning cometh & crying “All they that devour thee, shall be devoured and all thy adversaries, every one of them shall go into captivity & they that spoil them shall be a spoil. For I will restore health unto thee & I will heal thee of thy wounds. And out of thee shall proceed thanksgiving & the voice of them that make merry[” Jeremiah 30:16-17, 19].

Israel’s exodus from slavery in Egypt would be recapitulated:

And should the Pharaohs of Despotism demand blood as the price of Hungary’s redemption, God shall give them blood, not from the veins of her noble sons, but from her own rivers [Exodus 7:14-25]. Should they resist even unto *death*, God shall give them *death*, not from the ranks of Hungarian martyrs who have suffered more than a hundred deaths, but from the *first born* of all their families [12:29-33]. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay [Romans 12:19]. . . . This is the work of recompense, yours the song. “Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power. Thy right hand, O Lord hath dashed in pieces the enemy” [Exodus 15:6].

French hoped that God’s deliverance of Hungary would launch a fulfillment of biblical prophecy that would expand outward to encompass the whole earth, including the United States. In his effort to win the highly religious nation’s goodwill, Kossuth had engaged in biblical typology of his own, freely making laudatory comparisons between the United States and God’s justice in biblical history. Yet French was unimpressed:

You have been pleased before the Legislature of Ohio to make honorable mention of the U. States as the *Moses* of a *new Sinai* and to invoke his aid for the country. Ah, sir, the sword of this Moses may have weight, where *might* is *right*; but what avail is his “*mountain of law*” for all nations and what avail, while his own bosom is the sepulchre of a nation; the souls of whose martyrs from beneath the altar, joining with the groans of the living dead, cry out “How long, O Lord?” [Revelation 6:9-10]. See, thou art now among the tombs. But a word of caution. To roll away the stone from the grave of these dead for their resurrection, is a crime in this land of liberty, worthy a traitor’s doom, a murderous death—. Shine on, ye stars of *Freedom’s night*. Amidst the stripes of Afric’s wrongs; For in

Columbia's [perhaps "Columbus' "] land, the *white* man only is the freeman. . . .

You were pleased also, my dear brother, to compliment the star-spangled banner as rising over Sinai—Ah, Sinai, thou wast a mountain of law without mercy. So with our honored flag an emblem of *darkness without mercy*. The stars shining out from the night of republicanism upon the stripes of injured helplessness. O how what appropriate juxtaposition. How truly is *[illegible]* forth the fact that *sectional* patriotism, sectional in the occasion of its existence & equally so in accomplishing its end, can shake hands over the grave of injured & helpless innocence, can consent for a sister section to act the part of a tyrant, a murderer, if that patriotic section will lend her aid to prevent a . . . common foe from committing the sin of exorbitant taxation. The spirit of *republicanism*, in a northern *[illegible]* so very patriotic, has consented to a work of oppression, a work of tyranny, a work of absolutism over the bodies & souls of men & women & children of the same God & Father of us all such as Hungary's sons & daughters never knew, never felt, & God grant they never may!

French's bitterness at America's hypocrisy over freedom was severe. By now he was disgusted with his government and his land and wanted no part of it. Instead he longed for the day that slaves in Hungary and in the United States would be freed, and all oppressive governments, including his own, would disappear.:

O ye stars of night and strips of oppression, felt emblems of what you see beneath, your mournful mission will soon be accomplished. This night of *republican liberty*, liberty to resist the foreign tyrant & turn tyrant over the weak of our own, shall give place to a bright morn of Universal Freedom. The bright sun not of Patriotism, but of *Righteousness* is rising—with *healing in his beams* [Malachi 4:2]. These bloody stars of Republicanism shall fade away like meteors before the brightness of his rising & these strips shall be without expression, for he has healings in his beams for all Africa['s] wounds & woes. [Not] The spirit of Patriotism raised on high, the star spangled banner with loud proud acclamation, but the spirit of Universal Freedom, when her glad morn shall down on poor Africa & bleeding Hungary, shall shout that proud banner down to the dust.

French concluded his exhortation to Kossuth thus:

My brother hope *thou in God*. And while the *Eagle of Republicanism*, the *Lion of Constitutional monarchy*, the *hyena* & the *bear of absolutism*, bite and devour, each their foes, and each the other; for they have each their country & their country's rights, where all must yield to *might or fall a prey*, we will hail a *dove*, the *gentle dove with olive branch* [Genesis 8:11], the *emblem of the Free*, the

Freedom of the kingdom of *righteousness & peace*. Her claim is on every land. From heaven she came to bear witness on the baptismal day of the *Prince of Peace*, our great deliverer [Matthew 3:16]. She ushered in the reign of love. O my brother, be thou the *dove*. Seize the *olive branch* on every land, through every claim, bear the emblem of the *Free*.¹³⁷

Thus French expressed his burning passion for *liberty* for oppressed peoples everywhere on earth, especially for black slaves in the United States, and his sentiment of *fraternity* and yearning for *equality* among all, including between black and white. Yet unlike the French revolutionaries—or Americans or Hungarians—Mansfield French rejected politics, much less warfare, as the means to accomplishing this. French's millennial hopes burned brightly, but he was waiting for a transcendent miracle for the millennium's inauguration. The only role that humans who longed for freedom were to play was to love their oppressors and submit to slaughter in holiness until Christ overturned tyranny by supernatural means.¹³⁸

French's commitment to loving all of creation in keeping with Universal Freedom was sincere, yet he could not detect the germ of "sectional patriotism" within his own soul that would play a part in driving him to the antithesis of pacifism one decade later. Enmity between the rival cultures of New England and the coastal South was deep, stretching back to seventeenth-century colonial days and to England before that. Each found the values and customs of the other repulsive. Although these sectional cultures and some others in British America united in the Revolution in the face of the greater

¹³⁷ Abolitionists of the 1830s also used inflammatory anti-American rhetoric that in their minds was entirely in keeping both with pacifism and with the values on which the nation claimed to be founded. See Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 48-50.

¹³⁸ The same themes on display in the draft letters to Kossuth appear in an article French wrote about an 1857 stop at the home of Harriet Beecher Stowe and her husband at Andover Seminary; see Mansfield French, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 19, 1857.

enemy of the Hanoverian crown and its Tory supporters, reciprocal disdain lingered afterwards with overtones that can justly be called ethnic.¹³⁹ French was no exception to the pattern. He bridled against Englishman Thomas Hamilton's estimation

of the Yankee as a cool, deliberate, calculating class of persons who are interested in nothing generous and noble, but possessed of all devotion to everything in which *self* is conceived. Let him compare the benevolent exertions of the Yankees with those of the Middler and Southern effort and he can at once see a contradiction of the statement.

Later French sternly admonished his daughter Eliza about reading a novel—a worldly practice he abhorred anyway—by Caroline Howard Gilman entitled *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. “‘Can any good come out of Nazareth?’” he exclaimed, quoting John 1:46. “What had the South to offer in that line, to benefit a *Northern* schoolgirl?” French put his prejudice in explicitly ethnic terms when Eliza was approached by a suitor from Indiana, a state with only a small Yankee population at its northern fringe. Eliza's interest in the suitor's attentions “sent a wave of chilling sensations over me. No haste in such matters.” The protective father had another candidate in mind “of superior order—I fear *Indiana stock*.” Thus French was stamped with an ironic pair of dispositions that he shared with many other progressive Yankees: on the one hand a fervent belief in the equality of nonwhites with whites, on the other hand ethnocentric bigotry toward white Americans of other cultures, even those of British extraction.¹⁴⁰

French's antipathy toward the South would not bear fruit for several years, however. In the meantime, newly installed as the principal of the Xenia Female Seminary

¹³⁹ David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), NOOK e-book, 838-46; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 80.

¹⁴⁰ M. French to A. French, June 6, 1834, FFP; M. French to E. French, February 14, 1854, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 12, 1857, FFP.

in 1854, he stood on the threshold of an unexpected opportunity to put his racial egalitarian principles into practice and make a genuine contribution to Universal Freedom.

Wilberforce University and *Beauty of Holiness*

The Xenia Female Academy was founded in 1850 by an assemblage of the leaders of the western Ohio town. Its original denominational auspices, if any, are unknown, but in 1853, fearing competition by up-and-coming common schools, the trustees transferred ownership and management to a body with greater institutional heft and a rapidly lengthening track record of educational administration—namely, the Methodist Episcopal Church, specifically in this case its Cincinnati Conference. One year later Mansfield French succeeded Asbury Lowrey (or Lowry) as principal and promptly changed the school's name to Xenia Female Seminary and Collegiate Institute, according to his longstanding preferred name format. The school with its new boarding house flourished under his experienced leadership. According to the Cincinnati Conference's minutes, during French's first winter the seminary "was visited with a gracious revival of religion, which resulted in the conversion of a large number of the scholars." By the end of 1856 French was teaching natural philosophy (i.e., physics and chemistry) and "Higher Mathematics" in addition to his administrative duties; his wife Austa was the "Governess" over the young ladies' conduct and taught "Moral Science," physiology, botany, and reading (i.e., elocution); daughter Eliza taught mathematics, ancient

languages, and composition; and four other instructors handled other subjects.¹⁴¹

In the meantime another, more exciting educational endeavor was budding in which Mansfield French played a critical role. From colonial days onward there had been a movement to educate blacks, both slaves and freedmen (although education of the former became limited through antebellum legislation), that resulted in a number of schools being established and in a few cases admission of blacks into white schools. In the mid-nineteenth century this movement reached a new milestone in southwestern Ohio. The Underground Railroad was more active in Ohio than in any other state, and most of the escaped slaves who came through Ohio entered at Cincinnati and Hamilton County. Most of the free blacks in the state were concentrated there as well, which aroused mob violence against blacks but also white efforts toward the uplift of black people. The burgeoning social need was particularly felt by the Cincinnati Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which contained many black members. At the 1853 Cincinnati Annual Conference a committee was appointed to investigate what might be done “to promote the welfare of the colored people among us.” The committee’s report highlighted the need for qualified black teachers and recommended founding a higher educational institution to train more, explicitly affirming “the black man[’s] . . . full share in our common humanity” and “the unity of the human race.” Two years later, the 1855 conference sought the assistance of both the next General Conference and the African Methodist Episcopal Church to launch this institution. John F. Wright, presiding elder of

¹⁴¹ M. A. Broadstone, ed., *History of Greene County, Ohio: Its People, Industries and Institutions*, vol. 1 (Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1918), 454-57; Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: n.p., 1856), 536-39; “Minutes of the Cincinnati Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1855,” 16, *Cincinnati Conference Minutes, 1852-63*, AOUM. After French’s administration the school changed its name to Xenia Female College and then Xenia College. It closed its doors in the 1880s.

the East Cincinnati District, was the most active participant in the movement, and he successfully engaged the support of the A.M.E. Church.¹⁴²

The 1855 Cincinnati Annual Conference also requested the transfer of Mansfield French's membership from the North Ohio Conference (as Xenia was within the Cincinnati Conference's territory) and, thanks to his wealth of experience starting schools, appointed him with Wright and two others to a committee to make higher education for blacks a reality. An obvious initial challenge was to find an adequate facility for the institution. French made the breakthrough, recommending an abandoned health spa at Tawawa Springs two to three miles from Xenia. The property was perfectly suited to the purpose, already having a furnished building with two hundred rooms for use as a dormitory and classrooms plus cottages to serve as homes for faculty. The rest of the committee agreed to the selection at its first meeting on October 31, at which Wright was elected chairman and French secretary. The committee also voted to begin forming a board of trustees, to appoint Wright as an agent of the school, and to name it The Ohio African University.

In December French was authorized to join Wright in raising funds for the new institution as his time allowed in addition to his duties as the principal of the Xenia Female Seminary; he was promised ten percent of the subscriptions for his travel expenses and for remuneration. In March 1856 the owner of the Tawawa Springs property finally accepted the committee's third offer, which amounted to thirteen thousand dollars, of which three thousand was to be paid within sixty days. The General

¹⁴² Frederick Alphonso McGinnis, *A History and an Interpretation of Wilberforce University* (Wilberforce, OH: n.p., 1941), 17-22, 29-30.

Conference did not endorse the Cincinnati Conference's plan until just before the deadline, at which point three men put up the money for the down payment on condition that they be repaid within sixty days more. Wright and French worked busily at the task, Wright going to Eastern cities and French going to Methodist Conferences in the West, and they managed to pay off the sixty-day note on time. Nevertheless, the whole of the purchase price with interest was due by May 24, 1858, not to mention the cost of equipping and staffing the school—there was still much work to be done. Around this time French suffered a major injury at Xenia Female Seminary when plaster detached from a wall and fell on his head. Although the injury was severe enough to force him to resign from the principalship of the school after his second year, it also disposed him to give himself entirely to the object of raising money for the new black university.¹⁴³

A portion of the conference committee that bought the Tawawa Springs property, including French, met in August 1856 and renamed the school Wilberforce University after William Wilberforce, the British member of Parliament who led the crusade to abolish slavery in the British Empire. The committee also voted to file for incorporation and elected trustees. When the trustees met the following month, Wright was elected president of the board and French continued as secretary. Four of the board members initially elected were from the African Methodist Episcopal Church, including Daniel A.

¹⁴³ "Minutes of the Cincinnati Conference . . . 1855," 16, Cincinnati Conference Minutes, AOUM; "Subscription Book Used 60 Years Ago," FFP; McGinnis, *History and an Interpretation*, 31-33; Original Minutes of Wilberforce University, 1855-1863, typescript, 1-6, FFP; "Minutes of the Cincinnati Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1856," 31, 34, Cincinnati Conference Minutes, AOUM; Edmund H. Waring, *History of the Iowa Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (n.p., n.d.), 155; M. French to W. French, September 12, 1856, FFP; "Subscription Book," FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 108-9; Henry Noble Sherwood, ed., "The Journal of Miss Susan Walker," *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 7, no. 1 (January-March 1912): 16.

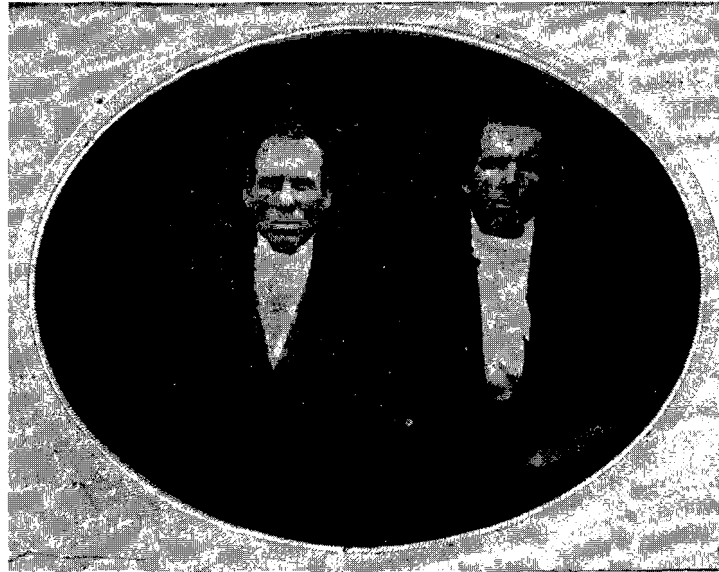


Figure 3. Richard S. Rust and Mansfield French, ca. 1858. FFP.

Payne. Yet one illustrious member of the board stuck out from all the others: Salmon P. Chase, Ohio's Republican governor. French visited Chase to convince him to take his seat on the board at its second official meeting in February 1857. Chase recorded that French, pouring on the evangelical charm, told him that "he had felt himself impressed to send me a text of scripture—that many are praying for me—that many hope much from me." Chase was persuaded and came to Xenia. Although he attended only one meeting of the Wilberforce board, Chase's name lent cachet to the fledgling college. Much more important, however, was the linkage that French had successfully forged between himself and Chase, which was to produce far-reaching consequences in the coming years.¹⁴⁴

Despite the intended purpose of providing education to blacks in southwestern

¹⁴⁴ McGinnis, *History and an Interpretation*, 33-34; Original Minutes of Wilberforce University, 7-14; John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, Vol. 1: Journals, 1829-1872 (Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1993), 268-70. In 1856 Wilberforce only had students in its Preparatory Department, which was overseen by a principal. The school secured its first president, Richard S. Rust, in June 1858; see Original Minutes of Wilberforce University, 25. Rust and French became sincere friends. There are only two photographs of French, taken perhaps ten years apart, among the French Family Papers; in both he is posed beside Rust (Figure 3).

Ohio, most early Wilberforce students were the biracial children of Southern planters with a minority recruited from among Northern free blacks.¹⁴⁵ This did not diminish French's zeal to fund the university, which had also become his sole livelihood. However, Wilberforce was not the only cause he pled as he roamed the North searching for donors. Naturally he championed holiness also, this time bringing a new item to his hearers' attention: a magazine.

By 1856 Methodists had been eagerly devouring magazines for some years. In the 1820s unofficial regional Methodist magazines sprang up, most prominently *Zion's Herald* in Boston, a periodical that became dominant enough to serve as the virtual official organ of the church in New England for many years. Other magazines were started by reformers whom Methodist brass feared were upsetting the order of the church. To counter the reformers' gains, Nathan Bangs launched the first official Methodist publication, New York City's *Christian Advocate*, in 1826 (known during most of French's career as the *Christian Advocate and Journal*). Two years later it had twenty-five thousand subscribers, the largest circulation of any periodical in the country. It also spawned regional imitators that likewise possessed official imprimatur although they exercised independence from central authority to varying degrees. By far the largest of the spin-offs, rivaling and at times surpassing the *Christian Advocate* in readership, was Cincinnati's *Western Christian Advocate*. Other national "Advocates," defined not by

¹⁴⁵ McGinnis, *History and an Interpretation*, 36-37. With the coming of the Civil War, Southern planters were no longer inclined to send their children North to Wilberforce for an education. Due to the precipitous drop in students and tuition revenue, the university suspended operations in 1862. In 1863 the Cincinnati Conference dissolved the university and sold the property to the African Methodist Episcopal Church represented by trustee and bishop Daniel A. Payne. The A.M.E. Church reincorporated the school and began teaching students within months. This is the Wilberforce University that exists today (38-42).

region but by area of interest, followed: the *Sunday School Advocate* (which dwarfed all other Methodist magazines in subscribership) and the *Missionary Advocate*. Other large, national Methodist publications of the era included the *Ladies' Repository* and the *National Magazine*, and, for the intellectual, the *Methodist Quarterly Review*.¹⁴⁶

The voracious, new demand for reading material also created space for publications that catered to niche interests. The interest of Timothy Merritt, associate editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, was sanctification, and with Phoebe Palmer's encouragement he launched a magazine in 1839 called the *Guide to Christian Perfection* (later named the *Guide to Holiness*). The magazine served as a vehicle for those who had experienced perfect love to testify to it publicly, which, as Palmer taught, was essential to retaining it. These testimonies were also necessary to stimulate others to seek the gift and believe that they had received it.¹⁴⁷ The *Guide* likewise enabled Palmer's teaching to go beyond the New York orbit, which turned her passion into a movement and herself into a national and international figure. Palmer's reports to the *Guide* of the results of her itinerant ministry outside New York City compounded the movement's momentum. The magazine's subscriber list soared to sixteen thousand by 1860, a larger total than all but a few of the regional Methodist magazines at that time.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 213-14. Subscribership figures from Methodist magazines in 1857 are as follows (arranged in descending order of size): *Sunday School Advocate*, 114,692; *Missionary Advocate*, 34,000; *Ladies Repository*, 30,000; *Western Christian Advocate*, 29,600; *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 27,600; *National Magazine*, 16,000; *Northern Christian Advocate*, 15,000; *Zion's Herald*, 11,700; *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, 10,500; *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate*, 8,000; *Christian Apologist* (a German magazine), 7,000; *Central Christian Advocate*, 5,500; *Buffalo Christian Advocate*, 3,000; *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 2,800; *Vermont Christian Advocate*, 2,000; *Pacific Christian Advocate*, 1,100 ("Our Book Table," *Forrester's Boys' and Girls' Magazine*, and *Fireside Companion* [October 1, 1857]: 141).

¹⁴⁷ See pp. 97-99, 105.

¹⁴⁸ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 92-93; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 47-48.

Despite the *Guide*'s popularity, there was room in the Methodist market for more than one Holiness periodical. Following the pattern set by the *Western Christian Advocate* as the first trans-Appalachian imitator of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*, a new monthly appeared in Delaware, Ohio in 1853 as a Western version of the *Guide*. It was entitled the *Beauty of Holiness; Devoted to the Sanctity of the Heart, the Life, and the Sabbath*. Like many magazines, however, after a few years the *Beauty* fell on hard times and failed to produce issues for January and February 1856. Its editor, Benjamin St. James Fry, and publisher, C. S. Weirich, looked for someone to take the publication off their hands and offered it to Henry V. Degen, a Bostonian who had assumed the editorship of the *Guide to Holiness*. At around the same time, Mansfield and Austa French offered to purchase the magazine. Degen deferred and Fry and Weirich agreed to sell to the Frenches.¹⁴⁹

This was a momentous step for Mansfield and Austa. They were convinced that they should pick up the magazine for several reasons.

First, the openings and leadings of Providence. Second, the opinion of several who walk in the light. Third, our own convictions of duty. Also the solemn review of life in a dying hour, and the judgment, now but a step before us. From these considerations we dare not refuse to enter this open, "effectual" door.¹⁵⁰

The "three fold object of the work" was defined by its subtitle: "The Sanctity of *the Heart, the Life and the Sabbath*." A "pure heart" referred to receiving the blessing of sanctification; a "pure life" meant "doing *right*, and *only* right, before God, and *doing good*, all the good possible, with our *talents* and our *substance*"; and, as a sort of forceful

¹⁴⁹ Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 48; "Our Predecessors," *BH* 7, no. 1 (March 1856): 78; "The Spirit's Baptism," *BH* 13, no. 4 (April 1862): 126.

¹⁵⁰ "To Our Tried Friends," *BH* 7, no. 1 (March 1856): 78.

afterthought, “[t]he observance of the holy Sabbath, is indispensable” to both. In the Frenches’ eyes—probably more in Mansfield’s eyes—the greatest need among these three was the pure life. As they saw it, there were “[m]any pious and talented persons” publishing on holiness, but there were also many who had professed sanctification but slid back from it and denied it by their poor outward behavior and speech. Another rampant contradiction to pure life was “a perversion of talents”—that is, young men called to preach Christ who were not devoting themselves to that pursuit.¹⁵¹ A third is “perverted substance,” the acquisition of wealth instead of giving it to missions and educational institutions—obviously a dear subject to Mansfield French.¹⁵²

The Frenches’ venture came at no small risk; they realized that they might lose hundreds of dollars in the first year. They also expected derision for their obsession with their

theme . . . Holiness, Sanctification, Faith. . . . If [martyrs] could give *their lives*, can we not give our *ease*, reputation and substance? . . . We expect to sacrifice and to be despised, but “we expect in it, to please not man, but God.” . . . Therefore we cannot be on both sides.—Tho’ we love our neighbor as *ourselves*, we must take the side of God, against him and ourself. Against his sins, against *all iniquity*. There is no middle neutral ground. He that is not for me, is against me, saith the Holy One. . . . For the last thirteen years, this “Full Redemption,” has been our theme, and by grace, “*shall be* till we die.” We have been a proverb, and byeword *literally*. . . . All we, or any Christian, “sanctified wholly,” have to do, is this, meekly to bear our *whole testimony* for God, truth, holiness, and *quietly* and silently bear the consequences. . . .¹⁵³

Buying *Beauty of Holiness* was also momentous for Austa French personally. The

¹⁵¹ Their own eighteen-year-old son Winchell may have been on their minds; see French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 114; pp. 559-65 above.

¹⁵² “The Sanctified Life: Introduction,” *BH* 7, no. 1 (March 1856): 68-69.

¹⁵³ *BH* 7, no. 1 (March 1856): 49, 78.

Frenches were typical of many households in perfectionistic circles in that it was the wife's spiritual yearning that led her husband into perfect love. The Holiness Movement allowed an outsized role for women, especially for the wives of respected male leaders.

According to Timothy L. Smith,

Such women conducted week-day holiness meetings, wrote articles and sentimental poetry for *The Guide*, devoured the biographies of early Methodist female saints, and spent summers at camp meetings supervising children's work and leading their more timid sisters into the emancipating blessing.¹⁵⁴

Austa's role to date had been to raise children and manage the household while Mansfield was away and to teach students as a means of supplementary income, all the while praying for her husband's ventures. Now with the two oldest children out of the house Austa had a chance to apply herself directly to her passion, the cause of holiness, using the literary skill that her advanced Yankee education afforded her. While Mansfield managed the business of the *Beauty*, Austa edited the magazine, which included a regular portion of her own writing. Austa was convinced that she and Mansfield had found their purpose in life: Mansfield proclaiming holiness with his voice and she with her pen.

The thirty-two-page magazine followed a standard format. The bulk of each issue was composed of articles about holiness culled from a range of sources. At first most of these were reprints of previously published material. John Wesley's work appeared regularly, and the writings of other classic Methodist luminaries like John Fletcher did also. Much of the material consisted of articles originally published in other magazines. These were mostly from Methodist sources, but other denominations' perfectionists appeared as well, especially Congregationalists like Charles Grandison Finney and Henry

¹⁵⁴ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 144.

Ward Beecher; the Frenches consistently struck an anti-sectarian tone in keeping with the tenor of the movement overall.¹⁵⁵ As the magazine grew more popular, reprints gradually gave way to articles written expressly for the *Beauty*, but they never disappeared entirely. The *Beauty* regularly featured a section called “Sabbath Miscellanies” that urged proper Sunday observance of worship and rest from business on both individual Christians and the wider society. This section was a carryover from the previous editors and always included reprinted material; although the Frenches were careful Sabbath-keepers, this was not their area of interest. Another regular section was “The Garner of the Lord,” which encouraged readers to give generously to missions and benevolent causes (in general, not usually naming specific enterprises). Its articles were written or supplied by Mansfield as a complement to his work raising money for Wilberforce. A third monthly section comprised letters sent to the Frenches from appreciative readers who testified to receiving or seeking sanctification. This section grew longer as the *Beauty*’s popularity increased. Other sections appearing frequently but not monthly included one aimed at children and another that focused on foreign missions. Religious poetry appeared in most issues, and to fill space at the end of columns Austa tucked in aphorisms and short, sentimental vignettes of a religious or domestic nature.

Two sections of the magazine that appeared every month are particularly important for understanding the Frenches. “Editorial Sketches” featured Austa’s own writing, usually one or two long articles on how to attain or maintain the blessing of holiness according to a method virtually congruent with Phoebe Palmer’s teaching.

¹⁵⁵ See, e.g., *BH* 7, no. 20 (November 1856): 334-36; cf. Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 38.

Austa's style was sentimental, florid, emotive, peppered with the word "O!", a bit long-winded, and often hard to follow. The last section of the magazine was called "Editorial Miscellanies." It was composed of concise—usually one-paragraph-long—bulletins on a variety of subjects: news items, endorsements of other magazines and books, examples of generosity, and the *Beauty's* need for more subscribers. Although Austa generally compiled it, much of the material came from Mansfield, and it usually contained a somewhat longer opinion piece or two written by him. His bold, challenging, brief style was very different from Austa's; as he admonished her, "Let all our articles have *point, edge, application, unction*."¹⁵⁶ Austa's writing sought to direct the reader's emotions toward a new disposition of soul, Mansfield's toward a new disposition of principle. Austa focused on the outworking of holiness primarily in the context of interpersonal relationships, Mansfield in the wider church and world.

If *Beauty of Holiness* had only been Austa's work it would have been a pedestrian clone of the *Guide to Holiness* minus Phoebe Palmer's star power. Mansfield's fixation with the impact of holiness on the world, however, made the magazine into something the *Guide* would never be. Like most Northern advocates of perfection—including all of those outside the Methodist Episcopal Church—French was certain that it was impossible to exalt holiness without being unalterably and vocally opposed to *all* sin, including the great national sin of slavery. Therefore, it was impossible to publish a magazine about holiness without using it to denounce compromise with slavery.

As previously discussed, for years uncompromising abolitionists had militated

¹⁵⁶ M. French to A. French, June 12, 1857, FFP.

against the Methodist Church leadership's conflict-averse antislavery position.¹⁵⁷ Despite the Southern church's secession, debate over what to do about slaveholders in the Northern denomination intensified between the General Conferences of 1856 and 1860. One question was whether to do anything about it at all. Some maintained that the official stance of the church in the *Discipline* was clear enough, and that the denomination was therefore unquestionably antislavery. Others rejoined that numbers did not lie: the church contained far too many slaveholding members to be seriously considered an antislavery body. Another issue was whether slaveholders were protected by the church's constitution; if so, a much higher threshold of support was required to change the constitution to allow for their expulsion. Looming over both these questions was the precarious position of the conferences bordering the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which contained numerous slaveholders. These were already being aggressively solicited by the Southern church and were prone to defect if the Northern church prohibited slaveholding.¹⁵⁸

The debate was fought out in the Methodist press, which divided on the issue almost perfectly along the fault-lines of regional cultures. The *Christian Advocate and Journal*, the mouthpiece of the highest echelon of the church, was situated in socially libertarian New York City, where commercial interests—including the immense trade in cotton and textile goods—exerted an exceptionally strong pull over moral opinions. Although local evangelicals, including Methodists, were far more social justice-oriented

¹⁵⁷ See pp. 133-36.

¹⁵⁸ Arthur E. Jones, Jr., "The Years of Disagreement, 1844-61," in Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., *The History of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 2:199-202.

than anyone else in New York, within the denomination as a whole New York Methodists exhibited some of the same characteristics as their city. The moderate line was also promoted by the *Western* (Cincinnati) and *Pittsburgh Advocates*, which were published where Middlers and Upland Southerners mingled. Like New York, those cities had diverse and potentially volatile populations; unlike New York, slaveholding Methodists lived not far away. In those environs, willingness to compromise (and mind one's own business) was a mark of good citizenship. On the other side were abolitionist regional magazines *Zion's Herald* (Boston) and the *Northern* (Syracuse) and *Northwestern* (Chicago) *Advocates*, all published in the heart of the Yankee Belt. A more unusual magazine on the abolitionist side was the *Central Christian Advocate*, bravely published in St. Louis, Missouri, a slave state embroiled in a partisan war with free-soilers in Kansas, as an alternative to the Methodist Church, South's regional magazine published in the same city.¹⁵⁹

The same divide was visible among the Methodist magazines that filled the Holiness niche. Although the *Guide to Holiness* and *Beauty of Holiness* spoke with one voice about the essentiality of sanctification for the believer—which was virtually all either magazine talked about—discerning readers detected the difference between the magazines on the issue of slavery in the church. The *Guide* was by this time published in Boston, but it was still closely tied to Phoebe Palmer, who remained close to the Methodist leadership. Historian Timothy L. Smith pointed out that although the *Guide's*

¹⁵⁹ Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 213-14; Jones, "Years of Disagreement," in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:189. Almost all of the reprints from Methodist regional magazines in the *Beauty of Holiness* came from the abolitionist regionals listed here.

editor, Henry V. Degen, “pointed to the moral issues at stake in the election of 1856 and asked his readers to pray for the success of God’s man, he identified neither the man nor the issues.”¹⁶⁰

That same year, however, Mansfield French dropped some provocative prose into the *Beauty*’s “Editorial Miscellanies.” Heaping scorn on the Compromise of 1850 with its hated Fugitive Slave Act, he wrote, “Were not the case so terrible, it would really be amusing to see how many talk and write respecting national sins. We will contrive—we will legislate—we will conserve all feelings, all the interests of this dignified admirable country, with its just and pure laws, protecting inviolably, life, liberty, and sacred honor.” These “knowing ones,” as French called them, were oblivious to a “Superintending Providence,” thinking that they are in control of the country’s destiny:

How shocking to them to hear again in the pulpit petitions of old fashioned Christians, such as the following, “O holy God! overturn and overturn, till He shall reign whose right it is; till righteousness shall fill the earth as waters the mighty deep. O, do thou break the arm of the oppressor, and let the captive go free, let all the earth know that there is a God who ruleth in righteousness, fearful in judgment and wonderful in working.” What a surprise will it be to them when God answers these prayers; when “he ariseth to shake horribly the earth;” [Isaiah 2:19, 21] “To plead the cause of the poor, the needy, and him that hath no helper” [Proverbs 31:9; Psalm 72:12].

Then French savaged slaveholders’ self-justifying paternalism by comparing them to one of the great biblical villains:

Pharaoh was one of these “wise ones.” “We,” says he, perhaps, “will pursue these people [Exodus 14:5-9]. We will only bring them back to teach them not to steal. We have legislated—we will legislate for them. We will do the best we can consistently, for them. The causes now at work will bring the thing to a terminus satisfactory to all. . . . Huzzah for happy, prosperous Egypt.” Wo to the man that

¹⁶⁰ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 205-12.

striveth with his Maker.¹⁶¹

French also took on compromise with slavery in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Lauding the Baltimore Conference in the slave state of Maryland, French wrote,

. . . we saw that while we had been *talking* about OUR national sin and perhaps made ourselves unpopular with some, they had been *suffering* in their opposition to it. . . . It is the lukewarm opposers of the North who make their post severe. . . . We shall never put away so awful a sin, until we are *individually willing to suffer* in so doing. . . . If “we all strive together,” in the spirit of perfect self-sacrifice, “according to his working who worketh in us mightily,” [Colossians 1:29] this sin will be put away.

French noted in conclusion, “The peculiarities of ancient Methodism are more visible [in the Baltimore Conference] than in most Conferences. The doctrine of Holiness was ever most distinctly recognized as the mark of the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus [Philippians 3:14].” French tried to make the connection between abolitionism, sanctification, and Wesleyan heritage difficult to miss. Interestingly, however, in neither of the passages quoted above did French use the word “slavery.” His message was evident, but he was not yet as bold as he could be.¹⁶²

The *Beauty of Holiness* survived its first year under the Frenches, and in February 1857 Mansfield French took on a partner, a Methodist pastor in Columbus named John Frazer, for a short time. Frazer published, French promoted, and Austa continued to edit.¹⁶³ This arrangement provided the *Beauty* with a little more stability, but with the magazine barely meeting expenses French’s only income came from donations to

¹⁶¹ “Knowing Ones,” *BH* 7, no. 7 (June 1856): 175.

¹⁶² “The Position of the General Conference Respecting the Doctrine of Holiness,” *BH* 7, no. 22 (December 1856): 363.

¹⁶³ “Change and More Aid,” *BH* 8, no. 3 (March 1856): 96.

Wilberforce. Liquid cash was hard for the French family to come by, as it almost always was when Mansfield had an agent's job. Although he managed to avoid a third nervous breakdown, he fretted about money continuously for the next five years.¹⁶⁴

The only thing to do was to hit the road, journeying from one Methodist annual conference to another, mostly in the East, to drum up support for Wilberforce University and to sell subscriptions to the *Beauty of Holiness*. Although it was never easy, French succeeded passably at both and made some important friends. Easterners favorable to holiness were getting bored with monotony in the *Guide* and enjoyed the *Beauty* as a refreshing alternative. Some were editors, like *Zion's Herald's* Erastus Otis Haven, who could endorse the *Beauty* in their own publications. The most important new friends, however, were Walter and Phoebe Palmer. On his passes through New York City to raise money for Wilberforce from among upscale evangelicals, French attended the Palmers' hallowed Tuesday Meetings, and like many Methodist luminaries enjoyed their famous hospitality, dining with them and enjoying private conferences with the Palmers over the finer points of Holiness doctrine. Presumably without denigrating the *Guide*, with which she enjoyed a special relationship, Phoebe Palmer warmly welcomed the *Beauty's* resurgence. Soon she and Austa became correspondents, and letters and articles by Palmer began appearing in the *Beauty* on almost a monthly basis, lending her prestige to the Frenches' enterprise.¹⁶⁵ For their part, the *Beauty* had previously taken up cudgels to defend Palmer against the criticisms leveled at her teaching by Methodist clergymen

¹⁶⁴ M. French to A. French, W. French, and M. J. French, 1857-61, *passim*, FFP.

¹⁶⁵ M. French to A. French, 1857, *passim*, FFP; "New England Conference," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (April 15, 1857): 59; M. French to John Frazer, May 8, 1857, FFP; Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 123.

Hiram Mattison and Davis Wasgatt Clark.¹⁶⁶

The Frenches' association with the Palmers became even more important later in 1857 due to a remarkable power surge in the latter's ministry. In the summer and fall the Palmers traveled to camp meetings throughout Canada with astonishing results. Working at times from dawn until midnight they spoke to crowds as large as five or six thousand. They saw hundreds either converted or sanctified and at times witnessed an outpouring of the Holy Spirit so strong that mourners collapsed at the altar. On their way home in October, the Palmers stopped in Hamilton, Canada West, at the western end of Lake Ontario. What began as an afternoon prayer meeting turned into a three-week sojourn in which five hundred claimed salvation. The Palmers also responded to an entreaty from London, seventy miles further west, where two hundred more were saved. At the end of their Canadian tour, Phoebe Palmer estimated that two thousand had been saved and one thousand had been sanctified. The Palmers' amazing success coincided with a laymen's prayer meeting launched in New York amid the severe anxiety and hard times of the Panic of 1857. By year's end similar prayer meetings were being promoted in cities all over the Northern United States. Thus began the Prayer Revival of 1857-58, called by some *annus mirabilis*, the year of miracles. Across denominations there may have been as many as a million converts. The Methodist Episcopal Church was the biggest gainer; when the revival was over it counted twelve percent of its entire membership to be converts from that year.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 52-58, 143-44; "Review of Dr. Clark on Sanctification," *BH* 7, no. 8 (May 1856): 130-35; "Mrs. Palmer and Her Writings," *BH* 7, no. 12 (July 1856): 181-82.

¹⁶⁷ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 45-46; Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 63-79; J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in America* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1952), 23-26, 64-65.

Through the Palmers' correspondence with the Frenches, the *Beauty of Holiness* may have broken the news of the awesome work in Hamilton. Mansfield traveled there personally and saw the results for himself. He also found a ready supply of new readers. "Our Mag. takes *first rate* among all the *Ministers*. Its '*anti-sin*' character pleases the British. The *Guide* they say is *tame*. . . . Our Anti-Slavery tone suits them as much as Br[other] D[egen's] fails so to do." Within weeks of French's trip to Canada, sensing an opportunity to gain security for the magazine and free himself for other labors, he offered to buy the *Guide* from Degen, who was anxious over the financial pressure of the Panic. Degen countered with a proposal to merge the magazines in a partnership with Austa taking over as editor. Combining the larger *Guide* with the *Beauty* would make the joint publication *the* voice of Wesleyan Holiness. French told Austa that it would extend the reach of her pen "to hearts in Canada, the South and in England, you will never reach, without such arrangement." Moreover, French intended to raise the *Guide's* content to "a higher *standard*" by openly declaring to its readers that slavery was incompatible with perfection. French's Eastern advisors were supportive. Yet the merger did not take place in 1857 seemingly because either Austa or French's partner Frazer objected.¹⁶⁸

French's travels in 1858 included a trip to Washington, where he attended a soirée at the White House—he was disgusted by the immodesty of the women's costume in both luxury and exposure—and keenly watched the debates in the Senate on Kansas' application for statehood. French spent so much time in the East that at the end of 1858

¹⁶⁸ Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 58-59; M. French to A. French, November 11, 1857, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 16, 1857, FFP; M. French to John Frazer, November 27, 1857, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 30, 1857, FFP; M. French to A. French, date unknown (1857), FFP.

he relocated himself, Austa, Eliza, and eight-year-old Hamline to New York City as the new base of operations for his Wilberforce agency and for the *Beauty of Holiness* despite the higher cost of living.¹⁶⁹

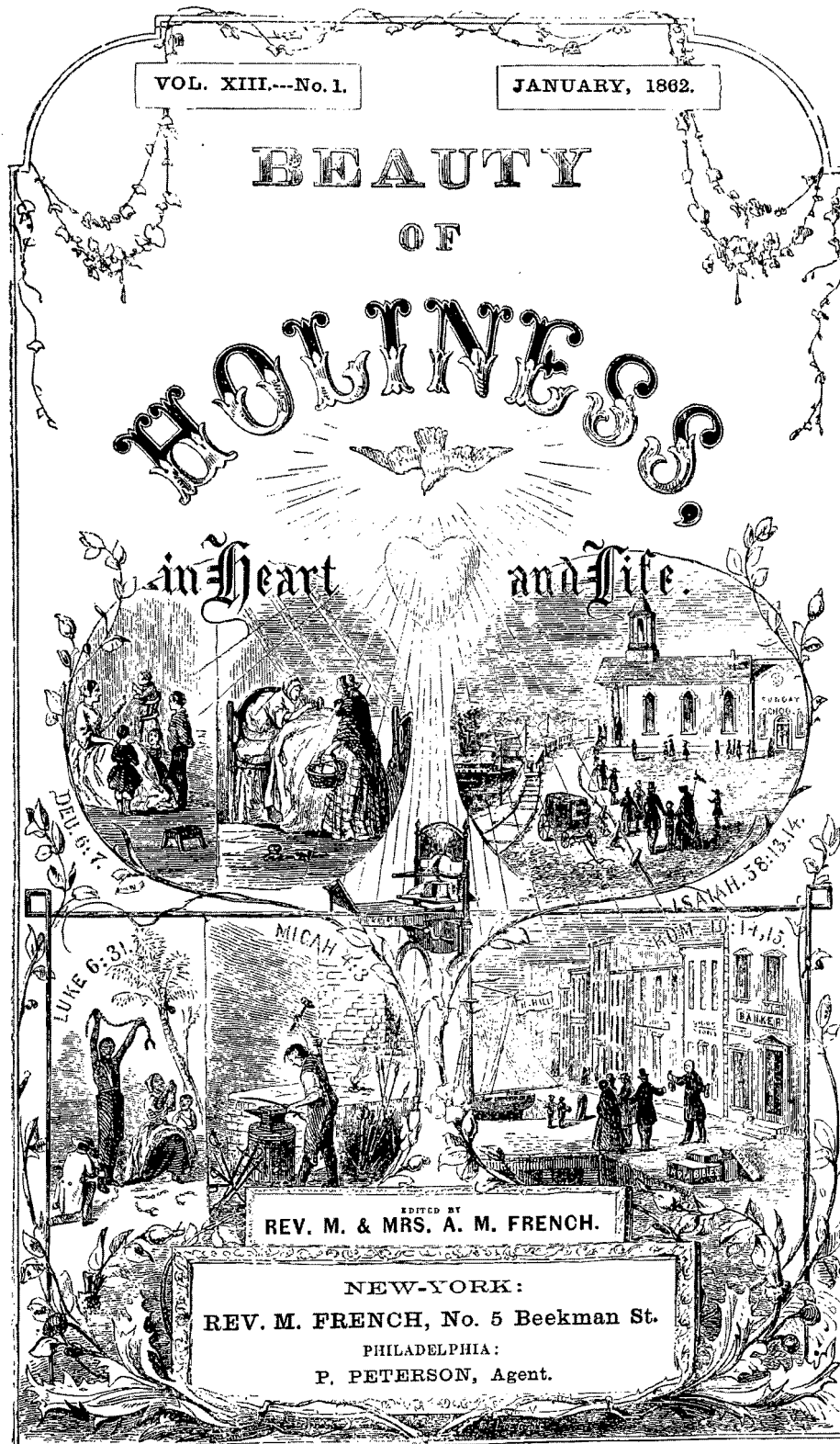
As 1859 dawned the magazine brushed up its image. French renamed it *Beauty of Holiness, in Heart and Life*. The *Beauty* bore an evocative new cover that depicted the outworkings of holiness in domestic life (teaching children and visiting the sick), Sabbath observance, and foreign missions support, each with a corresponding Scripture reference (Figure 4). It also displayed a black slave holding aloft a broken shackle as a black woman and child and a white master knelt in prayer beside him; in an adjacent scene a blacksmith beat swords into plowshares. The Frenches (most likely Mansfield) explained that

it mirrors our view of the Mission of Holiness.—We advocate not merely a seventh-day or a cloistered Holiness—but a working, aggressive Holiness, that enters the great battle-field of life, to do valiantly for righteousness, justice, humanity, God; in short, to get this erratic, babbling world wheeled into her moral orbit once more.¹⁷⁰

Inside the magazine, gone were “The Garner of the Lord” and sections on the Sabbath and missionary enterprises; the net effect was to concentrate the *Beauty* even more exclusively on how to gain and retain Christian perfection. Reprints from other magazines were fewer as the *Beauty* now had its own stable of regular contributors, some under pseudonyms and initials that were probably written by women. Austa’s articles

¹⁶⁹ M. French to A. French, March 10, 1858, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 23, 1858, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, November 15, 1858, FFP. Winchell was studying at Ohio Wesleyan and Mansfield Joshua was at an academy in Cleveland.

¹⁷⁰ *BH* 10, no. 1 (January 1859): inside back cover. Cf. “Holiness in the Battle of Life,” *BH* 10, no. 2 (February 1859): 63.



Monthly, \$1 per annum. Single Number, One Dime. Postage per year, Six Cents.

Figure 4. Front cover of *Beauty of Holiness, in Heart and Life* 13, no. 1 (January 1862).

were longer, as was the correspondence section. Some of the content was influenced by the 1857-58 revival. For example, more than ever the Frenches inveighed against sectarianism and applauded examples of Christian unity.¹⁷¹ There was also plenty of coverage of the revivalistic activities of the Palmers and James Caughey in the British Isles and of other Holiness revivals around the world. The Tuesday Meeting continued at the Palmers' home at 54 Rivington Street even while the couple was abroad, and the Frenches, regular attenders themselves, included in their publication anonymous testimonies from the meetings by those who claimed perfect love.

By 1859 Mansfield French was fully committed to denouncing slavery without holding back. Virtually every issue contained at least one piece on the topic, usually in the "Editorial Miscellanies." Though typically short, they packed a wallop. For example, in January 1860, in the aftermath of John Brown's execution for raiding the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia to arm a slave uprising, French waxed hotter than ever:

The human sacrifice, the stirring events of this day, the intense constant excitement, the deep sense of injury, the suppressed utterance under the indignant brow, the utter confusion in Congress, the increased wickedness in the South, the offering of large rewards for the heads of some of our best citizens, senators, and meek, loving ministers of the Gospel, the burning brows, heaving breasts, and suppressed breaths of even our young men and boys, the tears and indignation of woman, all show that the hour of the vengeance of God upon the sin of slavery, our national sin, is near. Friday, the execution-day of John Brown, was such a day as this country has not seen since our revolution, or rebellion it should be called perhaps, since the provocation was nothing, absolutely nothing compared with the wrongs which nearly madden all truly, virtuous, candid, and righteous persons.

French was certain which side would prevail in the intensifying conflict between freedom and slavery that stood before the Millennium.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 40-43.

There is not a doubt in the mind of an intelligent man, not one, on which side of this great question our holy, omnipotent God is. No one doubts which side must triumph before the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord. Oh! may it be the bloodless triumph of pure principle, of conscience, of righteousness! God in mercy grant it! Then from the sunny South and the majestic North, shall one song of jubilee ascend to our God who ruleth in righteousness, mighty to save [Isaiah 63:1]!¹⁷²

French's position on the nature of the conflict had not changed since his letter to Lajos Kossuth.¹⁷³ He still held out for a "bloodless triumph" in accordance with Christ, the Prince of Peace. He also should not be interpreted as identifying the North as the side of God and the South as God's enemy—to the contrary, the whole nation was under God's wrath because the whole nation was complicit in the sin, and after repentance the whole nation could be liberated into joyous jubilee. Nevertheless the feverish certitude of the piece, fueled by the assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism, and the identification of "wickedness in the South" cast an ominous shadow ahead.¹⁷⁴

The *Beauty's* outspokenness on slavery entailed significant risk to the magazine's fortunes. Of course it virtually annihilated the possibility of Southern readership, to which French blithely responded that "we don't want to go where truth cannot go." The magazine's strident tone, even though usually confined to one or two pages per issue, cost the *Beauty* some Northern subscribers as well, as French was part of a small radical fringe well ahead of the bulk of Northern, evangelical, free-soil, Republican preachers. However, as tensions between North and South rose to the breaking point and the

¹⁷² "Righteousness in Our Nation," *BH* 11, no. 1 (January 1860): 30.

¹⁷³ See pp. 171-80.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. "The Teachings of the Times," *BH* 12, no. 2 (February 1861): 60-61; "Our Only Plea," *BH* 12, no. 5 (May 1861): 158-59; see pp. 37-39 above.

Methodist Episcopal Church drove toward a stricter position on slavery, “[God] has raised up many faithful sympathizing co-laborers. In using our largest liberty, and proclaiming . . . ‘liberty from tyranny, and freedom from sin,’ we grieved many. . . . But we bless God that for every one lost he gave us ten.” In fact, the *Beauty*’s subscribership doubled in 1859. Readers may have been persuaded by French’s argument that “[n]o man or paper stands neutral now” and that

if he consents by silence to this sin, and you sustain him, what could you do more to sustain the sin, so far as that almost omnipotent influence, the press, is concerned? The press is the great agent in the hand of conscience, Christianity, God, for doing away sin. Now, however you may talk, if you sustain a silent press, you build up a pro-slavery engine. There is no escape. “He that is not with me is against me,” saith Jesus [Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23].¹⁷⁵

The *Beauty*’s list of subscribers doubled again in 1860, reaching “nearly ten thousand” by the beginning of 1861, which compared respectably to the sixteen thousand subscribers the *Guide to Holiness* had in 1860 and quite well to American magazines generally. The mushrooming subscriber base allowed and required French to give up his agency for Wilberforce University and concentrate his energies wholly on publishing. Readership grew not only because of the magazine’s stance against slavery but also because of French’s lengthening experience marketing and managing it. Advertisements appeared in the back pages of the *Beauty of Holiness* for such items as an atlas; sewing machines; “Brown’s Bronchial Troches” to cure cough, cold, and hoarseness (endorsed by professional public speakers like Henry Ward Beecher and other preachers); and other Methodist magazines like the *Methodist Quarterly Review* and the *Christian Advocate*

¹⁷⁵ M. French to A. French, May 26, 1861, FFP; George M. Fredrickson, “The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Randall M. Miller et al., eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 116; “Our Work and Commission,” *BH* 11, no. 2 (February 1860): 63; “Beloved Are You Anti-Slavery?” *BH* 11, no. 10 (October 1860): 318.

and Journal. French offered these items as premiums for readers—specifically ministers and ladies—who secured requisite numbers of new subscribers and their cash subscriptions; these prizes were promised in addition to a commission of twenty-five cents per new subscriber. French also arranged a deal with New York’s progressive Congregationalist weekly, the *Independent*, to offer yearly subscriptions to both periodicals to new subscribers for two dollars a year. (The *Beauty*’s yearly rate by itself was one dollar per year.) In a year and a half French gathered about four hundred new subscribers by this bargain. In August 1860 the *Beauty* bought out the tiny *Way of Holiness* magazine published in Vermont and acquired its subscribers as well.¹⁷⁶

Praise for the *Beauty of Holiness* started coming in from other evangelical magazines. The *Independent* called it “a well-edited Periodical, devoted chiefly to the advocacy of the doctrine of Christian Perfection, though its pages would be found interesting and profiting even to readers who do not accept this special view.” The *Methodist Quarterly Review* called it “perhaps the ablest and truest periodical advocate of its high theme in the country.” Finally, at the beginning of 1862, the *Christian Advocate and Journal* gave the magazine what might have been the highest encomium of all: twin billing with the *Guide*, with the *Beauty* mentioned first. “Both are excellent periodicals, devoted to an important specialty,” proclaimed the editor. “We wish them well. May they go forth into all regions of the Church, animating the good, and calling them to the high

¹⁷⁶ “Doubling the List,” *BH* 12, no. 1 (January 1861): 32; “Literature, Science, and Art,” *The Independent*, February 28, 1861, 3; White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 93; Advertisements, *The Independent*, June 7, 1860, 7; Advertisements, *The Independent*, December 12, 1861, 8; “‘The Way of Holiness’ Merged,” *BH* 11, no. 8 (August 1860): 256.

regions of holiness.” The *Beauty of Holiness* had arrived.¹⁷⁷

Yet it arrived on the wings of civil war. Abraham Lincoln’s election to the presidency in 1860 spurred anxious Deep Southerners, beginning in South Carolina, to secede from the Union, afraid that the federal government would manage to eliminate slavery in the whole country and put white Southerners at risk of rape and massacre at the hands of their slaves, endangering both their property and their lives. When a standoff at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor turned into a bombardment of the federal stronghold, Lincoln called on loyal states to mobilize volunteers to quash the rebellion by force. Some states in the Upper South then defected to the Confederate States of America, which prepared to defend their country from Northern invasion.¹⁷⁸

During the conflict’s first year, the *Beauty of Holiness* was in most respects the same as ever—rigorously devoted to the necessity of entire sanctification by means of sheer faith and public testimony. Nevertheless, the magazine could not avoid being changed by the powerful tides of the war. Its subscribership and financial stability faced new threats. The crisis was changing French’s views on the nation, God’s providence, and warfare, in some ways deepening and extending prior convictions and in other ways altering them completely. The largest change for French, however, was happening outside the orbit of the *Beauty of Holiness* and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The fortunes of war in the birthplace of secession, South Carolina, created an opportunity for Mansfield French to strike a blow for Universal Freedom that he could not have imagined.

¹⁷⁷ “Literature, Science, and Art,” *The Independent*, February 28, 1861, 3; *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 13, no. 1 (January 1861): 177; “Editor’s Table,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, January 9, 1862, 12.

¹⁷⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 221-84.

THE USEFUL LIFE OF MANSFIELD FRENCH:
A MODEL OF MULTIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

VOLUME II

A THESIS-PROJECT
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CHAPTER THREE

ABOLITIONIST GOVERNMENT OFFICER (1862-68)

Men need never fear to throw themselves forward of public sentiment, so they keep in the high way, where justice & righteousness make their tracks. Sooner or later, the nation will approve.

—Mansfield French (1865)

An Experiment Begins

By late 1861, both North and South had come to grips with the reality that victory in the sectional conflict would take much longer to win than originally anticipated. As initial bravado in the Northern states gave way to teeth-gritting and soul-searching, abolitionists saw a chance to get the Union to adopt their emancipationist agenda. Earlier in the year abolitionists had kept fairly quiet so as not to disrupt the miracle of Northerners rallying to uphold the Union at the summons of a president who, though far from their liking, was elected on a lowest-common-denominator antislavery platform. Now, however, abolitionists saw an anxious populace ripe to listen to their twofold message: first, that the existence of slavery in the United States was the root cause and basic issue of the war without which disunion and bloodshed would never have occurred; and second, that the slave labor force was the source of the Confederates' power, not only because slaves labored on military fortifications and logistical operations but because each slave growing food at home freed a white man to serve in the Confederate Army. Abolitionists' logic became increasingly persuasive to the Northern public, and speakers pushing emancipation who were pilloried when secession began started to find receptive

audiences and even acclaim.¹

As part of this campaign of persuasion, a petition to the national government “in favor of Universal Emancipation” appeared in January 1862 signed by a coterie of New York City’s most prominent abolitionists, including Mansfield French. The petition—probably written by its first signer, renowned poet and editor William Cullen Bryant—alleged that “[t]he people of the United States” recognize that “lying at the very foundation of our Government” was “the solemn and undying truth that by nature all men are endowed with an inalienable right to liberty.” However, the American people had fallen into the habit of compromising this principle in favor of “an overshadowing attachment to the Union.” Unfortunately, the bargain was a bad one, because it “has nevertheless given birth to a mighty power in our midst . . . which has consigned 4,000,000 of our people to slavery, and arrayed 6,000,000 in rebellion against the very existence of our Government; [and] which for three-quarters of a century has disturbed the peace and harmony of the nation.” Now that the Southern “slave power” had taken its opposition to freedom to the nth degree by means of armed revolt, loyal Unionists were free “from every obligation to tolerate any longer its existence among us.” The New Yorkers concluded

that no harmony can be restored to the nation, no peace brought back to the people, no perpetuity secured to our Union, no permanency established for our Government, no hope elicited for the continuance of our freedom, until slavery shall be wiped out of the land utterly and forever. . . . Therefore, we . . . urge upon

¹ Bruce Levine, *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South* (New York: Random House, 2013), NOOK e-book, 132-34; James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 60-61; Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, January 4, 1862, American Missionary Association Archives, 15869, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

the President and upon Congress, [t]hat, amid the varied events which are constantly occurring . . . such measures may be adopted as will insure emancipation to all the people throughout the whole land, and thus complete the work which the Revolution began.²

Among these “varied events” was an unexpected, though predictable, crisis developing far away from the primary theaters of the war that provided a remarkable opportunity for the adoption of “measures . . . as will ensure emancipation.”

A major component of the Federal government’s overall strategy was to establish a naval blockade of the entire Confederate coastline, which was intended to cripple the agrarian South’s war-making capacity by preventing export of its cash crops—especially cotton—and importation of military materiel. It quickly became clear that the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron needed a base of operations and resupply on the Southern coast, or else its vessels would constantly have to make a longer trip to Northern ports. So it was that in an amphibious expedition that touched down on November 7, 1861, Union warships under Commodore Samuel F. Du Pont hammered the small coastal fortifications at the excellent deepwater harbor of Port Royal Sound, South Carolina. Confederate defenders did not last long before evacuating, and their places were promptly taken by a Federal force under the command of General Thomas W. Sherman.

When the Confederate garrison withdrew, the wealthy cotton planters of these remote Sea Islands around the quaint old town of Beaufort (pronounced “BYOO-furt” by natives) escaped as well. The planters tried to take with them as much of their movable wealth—that is, their slaves—as possible. However, most had to be left behind, often thanks to the slaves’ shrewd elusiveness, and many who were taken managed to slip away

² “Circular,” *The National Republican*, January 9, 1862.

from their masters and sneak back later. As a result, in one stroke Union forces suddenly found thousands of slaves behind their lines.³

Although the scale was unprecedented, the situation itself was not. Fortress Monroe, a Federal bastion at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula between the York and James Rivers, had never fallen into Confederate hands, and shortly after the war began it became a destination for runaway slaves. When the post commander, General Benjamin Butler, was confronted by a request from a Confederate officer for the return of his slaves in May 1861, the Massachusetts politician-turned-soldier was faced with a decision. Though not a progressive (yet), Butler considered it absurd that a rebel against the United States government would seek restitution under its constitution and laws. He refused to return slaves escaped from disloyal masters, considering them “contraband of war” like weapons, horses, or foodstuffs that might be captured from Confederate forces. Butler thereby provided an elegant, though temporary, justification for limited emancipation under circumstances of war without threatening the property of loyal slaveowners in border states. It also assigned the fugitives to a vague and precarious legal status as the non-free subjects of a non-slaveholding government.⁴

Word of Butler’s decision spread rapidly through the shadowy slave grapevine, and soon many others escaped and made their way to Fortress Monroe. The fugitives were impoverished, ill-clad, and starving, and reports of their condition began trickling northward. Among those who took notice were officers of the New York-based American

³ Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), NOOK e-book, 18, 22-23.

⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 24-25.

Missionary Association. Lewis Tappan was the major force behind the formation of this society years before as a “living protest” against the American Bible Society and American Tract Society, organizations that shied away from distributing materials to slaves and strictly forbade criticism of slavery in their publications in deference to Southern supporters. The AMA served as a missions agency that evangelicals with strong antislavery convictions could support in good conscience, and it went even beyond some abolitionists by attacking not only the institution of slavery but Northern “prejudice” and the “hateful caste feeling” that disdained association with blacks because of their color. Like other mission societies, the AMA sent out foreign and home missionaries, but among the latter were individuals who bravely went south to preach the gospel to slaves and to urge its antislavery implications on slaveowners. In response to the plight of “contrabands” in Butler’s command, Tappan, who served as the AMA’s treasurer from its inception, inquired the general about sending humanitarian relief. Butler welcomed Tappan’s overture, and by September 1861 a missionary was on the ground with aid and teachers following behind. For the rest of the war the AMA oversaw the work in Virginia and also sent many workers among freedpeople behind Union lines elsewhere.⁵

Therefore, when the Fortress Monroe situation repeated itself at Port Royal (the name of a small village which Northerners bestowed on the entire area occupied by Union forces), Tappan sought to gain information and access in order for the AMA to send missionaries, teachers, and clothing to contrabands there. How Tappan managed to

⁵ *History of the American Missionary Association: Its Churches and Educational Institutions among the Freedmen, Indians and Chinese* (New York: n.p., 1874), 11-12, 16; Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 70-71.

do so involved a critical difference between Fortress Monroe and the Sea Islands: the army in Virginia had only blacks, but the army in South Carolina had blacks and cotton, which had for the most part been harvested, baled, made ready for transport, and abandoned. Although some cotton bales were burned by fleeing planters to prevent them from falling into Union hands, much remained to be confiscated and sold by a Federal government desperate to fund its expensive war. Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's treasury secretary, sent Lieutenant Colonel William H. Reynolds in December to collect the lucrative crop. That circumstance put the Sea Islands to some extent under the auspices of the Treasury Department and its ambitious chief.⁶

Of course, this was the same Salmon P. Chase whom Mansfield French had persuaded to sit on the board of Wilberforce University when the former was governor of Ohio.⁷ French had kept in touch with Chase in the years since. When Chase was appointed secretary in March 1861 French wrote him exuberant congratulations, solemn advice, and the promise of fervent prayers. "I never knowingly flatter," French wrote,

but it seems you are to be the *Daniel* of the Cabinet, that the "king get no damage" [Daniel 6:2]. Oh may you have Daniel's decision, piety & Divine protection. . . . If you can keep clear of men who fear not God, take counsel of God rather than man, all will go well. If I ever prayed more for any one man than another that his ways might be directed by God, it is you, my brother Chase. I do feel that *God has use for you*. He may not let you always realise it. But he will, as he has heretofore use[d] you, if you cleave only to him. . . . I thank God he has kept you from all appearance of compromising with evil, that nothing has escaped your lips to make the man who fears God to blush. . . . Oh may God give you the single eye, & a pure life before the world.

If French was truthful that he "never knowingly flatter[ed]," then he flattered

⁶ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 29-31.

⁷ See pp. 185-86.

unknowingly a great deal, as would become evident in the years ahead. It would become equally plain that, as French predicted, God would not let Chase “always realise” his hopes for what “use” God might have for him. Flattery aside, French was candid about this prospect. “Now while from personal friendship, I desire your complete success, *all* the nation would have you do. Still I say in my heart, ‘thy will Oh God be done’. If your defeat or only partial success, will most glorify God, & most benefit the nation then I submit & God will take care of you his instrument if the people don’t.”⁸

French probably dropped Chase’s name with no little frequency among his New York evangelical abolitionist acquaintances. These included Lewis Tappan, who asked French to visit Chase in Washington on the AMA’s behalf. French’s mission was to get permission to go to Port Royal and investigate the condition of the contrabands as a preliminary to a relief, educational, and missionary effort by the AMA. On January 4, 1862 French presented the association’s plan to Chase, arguing that the society’s efforts would “doubtless aid materially in gathering the cotton” by “promot[ing] order, industry & economic living, among the colored people.” Chase was entirely supportive, probably appreciating a rough-and-ready fiscal rationale to justify exerting his influence according to his firm antislavery convictions. French also won from Secretary of War Simon Cameron a gift of free transportation to all missionaries sent to Port Royal.⁹

Before returning to New York, French voyaged to Fortress Monroe to see what the AMA had already begun among contrabands. The association’s on-site missionary

⁸ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, March 8, 1861, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁹ *Beaufort Tribune*, March 22, 1876; Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, January 4, 1862, AMA 15869.

was away, so to French's surprise it fell to him to preach on the Sabbath. For the first of innumerable occasions French rose to preach to an audience of former slaves. He was profoundly moved. After preaching on Psalm 34 in the morning, he rallied to preach even more energetically on Deuteronomy 8 in the evening. French interpreted the text in two ways. First, in a comparison that became absolutely fundamental to French's ministry for the next six years,¹⁰ he called the contrabands a new Israel and assured them that God would take care of them after sending severe judgments on their "Egyptian" masters who refused to let the people go. Then, shifting the typological association, French asserted that Virginia planters once were the "Israel" that was brought out from under oppression (presumably by the British Crown), but because they had forgotten the Lord and believed that their own power had gotten them their wealth, they were presently coming under God's judgment. A Methodist soldier attending worship was awed by French's aptitude for preaching to blacks. His "style of preaching is adapted to this class—plainness, simplicity, great earnestness of manner," he wrote. "I need not say his effort by the blessing of God was a complete success."¹¹

After returning to New York, French traveled to Port Royal accompanied by fellow Methodist minister J. W. Lindsay. French and Lindsay, neither of whom had never set foot on a plantation before, visited about twenty of them in the Port Royal area and were appalled by what they saw. They noted that slave cabins on these plantations consisted of one dark room. The contrabands each owned one suit of clothing that was

¹⁰ See pp. 280-85.

¹¹ "Colored Refugees at Port Royal," *American Missionary* 6, no. 3 (March 1862): 58; "Religious Matters at Fortress Monroe," *Zion's Herald*, March 5, 1862, 38; "Glance at Fortress Monroe," *Beauty of Holiness* 13, no. 2 (February 1862): 69-70.

designed to last for one year. These had been given out at Christmas in 1860 and were badly wearing away; the planters had fled before the new year's issue. The garments of fugitives who had made their way to the islands from the mainland after the Union occupation were in even worse shape; due to the arduous trip through thickly wooded, swampy terrain, their clothes were in some cases literally falling off their bodies. Disease among all was widespread.

Additionally, many of the contrabands were suffering badly at the hands of their sometime liberators. The army had plundered everything they thought might be of use, principally food. Although the army distributed rations to about a fifth of the contrabands—namely, those whom it had employed as laborers—as many as eight thousand were left to dig up wild roots and scavenge for whatever they could find. Northern aid workers alleged that Federal agents commissioned to secure the cotton harvest and ship it north hired contrabands for pitifully low wages and then sold them provisions at a steep markup, pocketing the profit for themselves and making food unaffordable for many. Some undisciplined and drunken soldiers under careless, unsympathetic officers molested and raped black women. The fugitives' masters had told them terrible tales about "Yankees"—for example, that they would sell the escapees back into slavery in Cuba—in order to dissuade them from running to Union lines. There proved to be a grain of truth in the planters' horror stories.

Despite all this, the blacks believed the Northerners to be angels, and they were much less afraid of them than of the prospect of the government abandoning them back to their masters. Nevertheless, with hopeful faith they began to take actions that they

believed were their first steps of freedom. As their highest priority, husbands hunted up wives sold away from them long before, often finding them. Parents likewise found their children. The contrabands also showed an eager capacity for learning; Solomon Peck, the Unitarian minister from Roxbury, Massachusetts, was the first to make his way to Port Royal to teach them.¹²

In addition to becoming acquainted with Peck, French met two other Northerners whose impact on the Sea Islands would be immense. One was a young, highly talented Boston lawyer named Edward L. Pierce. Pierce was serving in the army under Butler's command at Fortress Monroe when the first fugitives came through the lines, and Butler gave him the task of supervising their labor for the army. Like French, Pierce was Chase's friend and supporter; after Pierce's term of enlistment expired, Chase summoned him back from civilian life to look into the freedmen's well-being at Port Royal before French approached Chase. Pierce was wrapping up his tour when French arrived. Although the two men were "twenty years [apart] in age, and perhaps twenty leagues in temperament," in historian Willie Lee Rose's apt phrase, French and Pierce quickly found common cause in the uplift of the contrabands and commenced a short-lived but very productive partnership. The other Northerner of note was a career army officer, Captain Rufus Saxton, who at the time was serving as the chief quartermaster for the expeditionary corps. A Greenfield, Massachusetts native—he was four years old when

¹² "Aid for the Contrabands," *New York Tribune*, February 21, 1862, handwritten copy, 3F21-045-061, French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY; *Annual Report of the New-York National Freedman's Relief Association of New York, with a Sketch of Its Early History* (New York: n.p., 1866), 8; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 29-30; Edward L. Pierce, *The Negroes at Port Royal: Report of E. L. Pierce, Government Agent, to the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury* (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1862), 32-33.

French started conducting revivals at the Heath Select School twenty miles away—Saxton had responsibility for the shelter and provision of the contrabands laboring for the army. Due to the radical upbringing he received from his Unitarian and Transcendentalist parents—extremely unusual among U.S. military officers—Saxton had strong abolitionist convictions and took more than a passing interest in the blacks' welfare. Although his power to help was limited for the moment, he gave French his farsighted opinion of the contrabands' needs and possible destiny.¹³

Importantly, however, Saxton was not the only officer with whom French discussed the contrabands' problems. French also talked with the commanders at Port Royal, General Sherman and Commodore Du Pont, and won a letter from Sherman, which Du Pont endorsed, outlining the contrabands' plight and explicitly asking for Northern benevolence to meet the need, which was beyond the military's capacity to handle. In addition to genuine humanitarian concern, Sherman was surely relieved at the prospect of delegating this mammoth duty to others.¹⁴

French and Pierce were both convinced of the blacks' potential for elevation in every respect and saw the situation at Port Royal as a golden opportunity to prove it. They also were both concerned about opposition from other quarters of the government, not to mention the peril and suffering the contrabands were enduring every day. Both were obligated to report their findings to Secretary Chase, and before Pierce left the islands the two men settled on a plan. With the government's blessing, Pierce in Boston

¹³ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 30-33, 129; Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*, 30; " 'Freedmen' at Port Royal," *New York Times*, March 2, 1862.

¹⁴ "Aid for Contrabands at Port Royal," *New York Times*, February 23, 1862.

and French in New York would recruit missionaries of a peculiarly “practical” sort. From the government’s point of view, the missionaries would effectively take the place of the departed masters on the plantations; their job was to see that blacks kept working growing cotton for the government to sell, albeit with wages and without corporal punishment. Among themselves, however, the new “masters” had a different aim: to fit the blacks for freedom and to convince the Northern public that they were capable and worthy of it. It went without saying to French and Pierce that only moral people could be entrusted with freedom, that morality had to be taught, and that religion (i.e., Protestantism) was the means to teach it, so the aid workers would indeed be “missionaries.” Which form of religion was best suited for the job was an unasked question to become problematic later.

French strongly pressed to include women among the relief workers not only to teach literacy, arithmetic, religion, and morality, but also to inject “civilization” into the blacks’ domestic lives, especially by engaging black women. Reading between the lines of his communiqués to Chase, Pierce was skeptical. Reflecting the ascendant doctrine of separate spheres in the middle class of his era, Pierce was probably afraid that women might not be hardy or level-headed enough for the mission, and he was justly concerned for their safety in a male-dominated territory where soldiers had already proven their capacity for mischief and abuse. Yet with many years among women zealous for good works in female academies, Methodist meetings, and his own household, French knew better. Pierce reluctantly yielded to French’s urging when French promised to recruit and qualify female workers himself and to serve as their guardian on the islands. The decision

to include women at the outset of the mission was a stroke of genius, as many of them lasted longer and did more enduring good than the men who served. This early policy was one of the greatest contributions French would make in all his work in the South.¹⁵

Pierce submitted his lengthy report to Chase on February 3. The document is a tour de force, an extraordinarily thorough and lucid description of the condition of the islands, its economic prospects, and the condition and culture of the abandoned and fugitive slaves. Pierce also delineated his and French's proposal for the contrabands' uplift.¹⁶ French's far shorter report followed two weeks later, concentrating solely on the condition of the contrabands. French estimated that between eight and ten thousand former slaves were within Union lines; also, assuming an oncoming flood of fugitives and (unrealistic) military success expanding the Federal foothold, he believed that the number would soon swell to twenty to thirty thousand. French made note of the blacks' destitution of food and clothing and their sickness, also pointing out that "[t]hey have no spiritual ministrations as heretofore, and most earnestly desire religious instruction, as well as all the common means of civilization and enlightenment." He insisted that the blacks were loyal to the Union and would work hard for themselves and for its triumph.¹⁷

French also formally laid out a succinct plan to meet the contrabands' needs. An

¹⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 35; Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*, 33-34; Ira Berlin, et al., eds. *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, vol. 3 of ser. 1 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867; Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 156-57; John Niven, ed. *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, Vol. 3 (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 138.

¹⁶ Edward L. Pierce, *The Negroes at Port Royal: Report of E. L. Pierce, Government Agent, to the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury* (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1862). The report also appears in Berlin, *Wartime Genesis* and in Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, Vol. 3.

¹⁷ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:133-34.

organization would be formed in New York for this purpose; it would also “encourage the formation, & secure the aid, of auxiliary societies for the same object.” Donations of clothes and shoes would be solicited immediately. The organization would send missionaries and teachers who would found common and industrial schools as well as physicians to attend to the blacks’ medical needs. The government would supply free transport of the personnel and charitable cargo and furnish rations to the workers while the benevolent organization would pay their small salaries. Finally, the operation would be extended wherever Union forces extended their lines.¹⁸

By the time French sent his plan to Chase, his proposal was a formality. Chase himself had suggested the formation of such an organization in New York, and before French returned there in mid-February the group had already begun forming itself while awaiting his arrival. Meanwhile, Lincoln had approved Pierce’s plan, and Pierce had been preparing for the task in Boston for two weeks, tapping Reverend Jacob Manning to form the Educational Commission to recruit missionaries and solicit aid. The New Yorkers had to hurry to catch up.¹⁹

Recruitment and aid solicitation proceeded quite differently in Boston and in New York due to a combination of the short time New York abolitionists had to work with and the different talents and tendencies of Pierce and French. Cultural differences between the two cities and religious differences between the bulk of the contributors in each, which will be explored in the next section, may also have played a role. In Boston and

¹⁸ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:134; A. W. Stevens, ed., *Enfranchisement and Citizenship: Addresses and Papers by Edward L. Pierce* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1896), 87-88.

¹⁹ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 24, 1862, SPC; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 39-41.

neighboring Cambridge, Pierce “represented the facts quite fully to large numbers of persons specially invited to private houses where gentlemen of wealth and position have attended.” He “declined to speak at any public meeting—feeling that it is important to do the work in quiet conferences and to avoid too much publicity.” Moreover, he was fastidious about selecting only the best, brightest, most sensible, and most practical volunteers for the mission.²⁰

French, a veteran fundraiser and publisher, took a very different approach that revealed a knack for publicity that he would exercise often in the coming years. Shortly after his return to New York, French called for a meeting on February 14 to tell Lewis Tappan and other supporters about his journey. The American Missionary Association realized that the job at Port Royal was too large for it to handle on its own, so the ad hoc committee called for a public meeting on February 20 at Cooper Union, which was presided over by William Cullen Bryant. The famous hall was packed, with reporters from widely circulated newspapers also in attendance. Assisted by Lindsay, French did the bulk of the speaking, riveting the audience with his description of the contrabands’ dire condition. French commented that he had been asked why these people should be helped given their dubious future legal status. He replied that feeding, clothing, and educating them could determine their future status. When asked whether it would pay, he answered that “[h]e did not think that the Good Samaritan stopped to ask whether it would pay when he poured in the oil.”²¹

²⁰ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:138.

²¹ “Colored Refugees at Port Royal,” *American Missionary* 3, no. 6 (March 1862): 58-59; “Aid for the Contrabands,” *New York Tribune*, February 21, 1862, FFP 3F21-045-061.

Other speakers shaped the direction that New York philanthropy took. A Dr.

Bellows cautioned donors

to be careful, and avoid the mistake of doing too much for these blacks—of treating them as if they could not take care of themselves. He indorsed the sentiments of FREDERICK DOUGLAS, of letting the blacks alone. They required only a very little care in the transition from slaves to free men. All we need do, was to give them a start. Do justice and trust in righteousness, and the difficulties would disappear.²²

Bellows' opinion, shared by many abolitionists, was fed by genuine and highly progressive faith in blacks' abilities, intense fear of cultivating dependency on charity, acute awareness of blacks' long-term danger if Northern whites believed them incapable of self-support, and naive optimism about how blacks and the South would flourish automatically if only the foreign pathology of slavery were taken away. It must be noted that this impulse did not stem from miserliness or suspicion on the part of the donors, because when the vast needs became apparent both in Port Royal and elsewhere over the course of the war and early Reconstruction, givers responded generously. Rather, the intent in giving as little as possible was to prove the equality of blacks with whites. In the mid-nineteenth century, dependency on charity was considered incompatible with freedom, which ever remained abolitionists' supreme goal.

The result of the meeting was the appointment of another committee (which included French) to form a new organization, the National Freedman's Relief Association. The NFRA defined its task as the appointment of teachers for the contrabands who would instruct them

[1] in industrial and mechanical arts, [2] in the rudiments of [academic] education,

²² "Aid for Contrabands," *New York Times*, February 23, 1862.

[3] the principles of Christianity, [4] their accountability to the laws of God and man, [5] their relation to each other as social beings, and [6] all that might be necessary to render them competent to sustain themselves as members of a civilized society.

Churches, schools, and medical care stations were also to be established among the contrabands. General Sherman had only given an inch with his request for food and clothing, but the NFRA took the mile of total educational, social, and religious elevation.²³

As a bedrock principle of its organization, the NFRA deliberately treated the contrabands as free people despite their murky legal status. The association's founders shrewdly reasoned that by consistently calling the blacks free they were more likely to shape public opinion so that the contrabands would become so. The word "contraband" was absent from their vocabulary, replaced by "freedman" even in the name of the organization itself. If the blacks were free, then they needed to do what free people would do: support themselves by planting cotton for a daily wage under well-managed plantations and planting food crops for their own families. Charitable help that they received from the NFRA, like clothing, was to be deducted from their pay later on, although all provisions would be sold to them at cost.²⁴

There were some flaws in the plans of both the New York and Boston groups. As destitute refugees continued to flood the Sea Islands through the war, the ideal of blacks paying in some form for everything they received would prove impossible to meet fully. A much deeper problem was that the combination of the idealism of the abolitionists, the

²³ *First Annual Report of the National Freedman's Relief Association* (New York: n.p., 1863), 1, AMA 86333.

²⁴ *First Annual Report*, AMA 86333.

skepticism of the Northern public, and the belief of both that the world's problems were basically simple and yielded to simple solutions set up Port Royal's benefactors to promise huge improvement in a very short timeframe. Given the high expectations, the blacks about to emerge from slavery did amazingly well, but racial egalitarians' failure to deliver Utopia would become a major liability for blacks in Northern public opinion in the years after the war.

Other flaws were organizational. Despite their equalitarian language, it never occurred to the abolitionists planning Port Royal's renovation that former slaves who had raised cotton their whole lives—or at least some of them—were more likely to be good managers of plantation operations than white missionaries who had never seen a cotton plantation before. The racial superiority implicit in this presupposition caused practical problems in the early phase of the project, when many supervisors proved to be completely incompetent planters. Additionally, these whites who treated the contrabands as “free” did not consider that the blacks might use their freedom to work at something other than growing cotton.²⁵ Another problem lay in the NFRA's self-bestowed title as a “National” organization that sought the assistance of “auxiliaries” in other locales. The Bostonians were not about to play second fiddle to self-important New Yorkers, which sounded a discordant note from the beginning. The New York organization's self-concept by no means emerged from Mansfield French alone—compare it to the lofty and all-encompassing moniker “American Missionary Association”—but it fit a pattern of French's behavior that irritated partners from Boston would come to view as self-

²⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 178, 183-85.

aggrandizement.²⁶

Finally, French and the New Yorkers had to make up for lost time in getting aid and workers. French's talent as a publicist helped greatly. Stories about the Cooper Union meeting appeared in the *New York Tribune* and *Times*. French got the call for donations into newspapers in other ways as well. On March 2 the *Times* published Rufus Saxton's letter to French detailing the quartermaster's vision of the contrabands' plight and possibilities. Even before the February 20 meeting French had supplied an anecdote to the *Evening Post* of an elderly woman at Fortress Monroe who quipped that "if we could support ourselves and masters, too, I guess we could support ourselves, if we had a chance." Loads of clothes and shoes streamed into the warehouse at 320 Broadway, although the quality of much of it proved to be highly questionable. The NFRA also recruited and commissioned its initial wave of volunteers in a mere three days! This must have been much too quick to suit the careful Edward L. Pierce.²⁷

French did not assume that he would be one of the volunteers, despite that the NFRA had unsurprisingly named him its agent on the ground at Port Royal. Keeping the *Beauty of Holiness* going during the difficult wartime economic conditions was a major burden, and he was not sure how it would be maintained if he left. Yet no one that he approached was willing to go south in his place. Moreover, he could not help but reflect, "We have so long been praying and toiling for [blacks'] freedom . . . and now shall any

²⁶ See pp. 333-35.

²⁷ " 'Freedmen' at Port Royal," *New York Times*, March 2, 1862; "Cute Old Lady," *Evening Post*, February 8, 1862, 3; Henry Noble Sherwood, ed., "The Journal of Miss Susan Walker," *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* 7, no. 1 (January-March 1912): 15. Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 28, 1862, Port Royal Correspondence, pp. 76-77; Records of the Fifth Special Agency; Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, Record Group 366; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

possible labor be wanting to render it all possible benefit and permanence?" Concluding that "Providence pointed on, and cleared his way and led him out," French decided to go. He expected his absence to last at most a few months.²⁸

In the end, there were roughly even numbers between Boston and New York for the initial expedition to Port Royal. Pierce approved twenty-seven men and four women from Boston in addition to three men already on site (including Solomon Peck). French claimed twenty-one men and seven women from New York, including his wife Austa. There were also three additional women recommended directly by Chase, notably an impressive Ohioan named Susan Walker. Chase directed Hiram Barney, Collector of the Port of New York, to furnish transportation and food to the team of unlikely missionaries that embarked from New York on the steamship *Atlantic* on a wet March 3, 1862 for the four-day journey south. The Port Royal Experiment to show the nation that blacks were fit for freedom and citizenship was about to begin.²⁹

Intercity Discord and Slave Christianity

Taken as a whole, the approximately sixty missionaries on the *Atlantic* formed an unusual assemblage representing a wide range of ages, both sexes, and multiple denominations and religious viewpoints. Nevertheless, there was an evident division into two groups according to the cities that sent them. The missionaries from Boston were almost all the same—young, highly educated, abolitionist-reared, mostly Unitarian

²⁸ "Explanation," *BH* 13, no. 5 (May 1862): 167.

²⁹ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 157-61; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:139; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 48.

professionals, the rising cream of Boston's progressive elite. The women from Ohio recommended by Chase felt more at home with this half of the mission. French's New Yorkers were a more diverse and humbler group. Evangelicals predominated, representing a variety of denominations. Many of them were ordinary enough in appearance, but the severely plain Methodists looked a bit odd, and there were enough frayed-ended, wild-eyed, or unkempt idealists to draw the attention of some passengers. Despite their differences, however, the travelers had all come together for the same mission, and they started to break the ice on the voyage. Soldiers on board teasingly nicknamed them "Gideon's Band" after the Old Testament judge who triumphed over overwhelming odds with a tiny army of three hundred.³⁰ The typological association is so akin to how French's mind worked that it is plausible (though entirely speculative) that the mockers picked up the label from French's conversations with his fellow Gideonites. In any case, the rough joking gave the missionaries a common identity in an unsympathetic environment, and they proudly adopted the name "Gideon's Band" as their own. Austa French reflected that she and Mansfield were finally going on

a foreign mission, as we had long since had faith we might do . . . to minister to our Jesus in the person of his least ones; to sit down and weep with our dear colored sisters, over wrongs which our country had done them; to learn how God reveals himself to the least of all, his own; to bear some little share in the contempt hitherto poured upon them.³¹

Pierce and French were the clear leaders of the expedition, Pierce having the responsibility to establish order and supervise work on the plantations and French

³⁰ Judges 7.

³¹ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 48-55; "Letter from the Editors," *BH* 13, no. 4 (April 1862): 136.

overseeing the religious and educational aspects of the mission. The precise responsibility for distributing food and clothing seemingly went undefined. In principle the two men were peers; in practice Pierce had overall charge of the work among the contrabands. Nevertheless, the partners had a very smooth working relationship owing largely to Pierce's amazing ability to think the best and speak highly of those around him and thereby win their admiration. Immediately after arriving at Port Royal Pierce wrote Chase that "Rev[d. Mr. Fren[ch's] services & intervention have been invaluable to me. I do not see how I could have do[ne] without him. I delight to bear this testimony to one to whom I am so much indebted."³²

The day before the *Atlantic* put in to Port Royal Sound, Pierce and French addressed Gideon's Band about what they would find when they landed and how they ought to conduct themselves. Pierce went first, giving what Boston missionary Edward S. Philbrick called "some very appropriate and sensible advice and suggestions, expressed simply and with a good deal of feeling."³³

French followed. Most of his remarks described the contrabands as he saw them, "sensitive, acute observers [who] readily distinguish between a patronizing friend and a real one." He compared the blacks under slavery to children raised by abusive parents who constantly impress on the child his or her inferiority, leading that child to engage in bad behavior with bad company. The right approach for the missionaries to take was to be

³² "Beaufort," *The New South*, March 15, 1862; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:145. For an example of Pierce's ability to get along with all kinds of coworkers, see Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:154-56.

³³ Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed., *Letters from Port Royal: Written at the Time of the Civil War (1862-1868)*, ePub (Project Gutenberg, 2008), 6.

kind, gentle, and encouraging, even when the blacks failed. French encouraged the missionaries that if they demonstrated that the blacks' interests were their own, the people would trust them enough to allow them "to elevate and improve them."³⁴

Paternalism gets a bad name today, and French's speech was shot through with it. Without excusing the attitude, it is important to view it in light of the slavery from which the contrabands were emerging. Despite the vastness of certain plantation enterprises and the intrinsically economic nature of owned, forced labor, slavery was inherently domestic as well. Slaveowners viewed and treated slaves like children—dangerous children—and they did often function like profoundly abusive parents. Even kindlier masters acted on the assumption that slaves were incapable of being adults except biologically.³⁵ This had to have an effect on the psyche of the typical slave that would shape his or her interpretation of the white missionaries; it would not be undone overnight. Nevertheless, this interpretation would unravel much faster among blacks than most whites anticipated, and French himself would push for policies to replace white paternalism with black self-determination sooner than some other benefactors were comfortable with.

French also told the missionaries to expect to find a number of blacks roaming around, apparently idle. These contrabands, said French, were not shirking labor but were looking for family members. Missionaries should assist them in "this sacred work" while at the same time order, cleanliness, and employment must be secured so that every able

³⁴ A. M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves, or The Port Royal Mission*, ePub (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862), 27-29.

³⁵ Levine, *Fall of the House*, 33-34.

person might be employed.³⁶

The contrabands' greatest anxiety was to know whether they were actually free. This was a delicate question, of course. French believed that God, "who overruleth all things, has now decreed them Free, and Free Forever . . . and that events will soon prove it. It is this conviction that gives warrant, dignity, as well as sacredness to our mission" and would keep missionaries diligent in the work. French's response reveals the confident faith in the providence of the God of Universal Freedom that impelled all his labor on behalf of black people, and it resonated with the missionaries from both cities, who interrupted him with applause. This was not the answer to give to the contrabands, however. French suggested that the missionaries reply that they believe the blacks to be free, but also that at the present time the freedpeople were on trial to prove to the rest of the North whether they could handle freedom or not. It is uncertain whether the contrabands discerned the subtlety in this response and also whether French himself had worked out how God's providence was inexorable if everything depended on the contrabands' behavior.³⁷

French also spoke to the Gideonites about the blacks' religious ways, which he considered a very important subject in view of what he observed of the missionaries on the voyage. He explained that the blacks "have a religious experience deep in the heart, learned in the school of toil and sorrow, which possesses great value to them." French suspected that most of his fellow missionaries, especially the intellectual Unitarians,

³⁶ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 27.

³⁷ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 27.

would not understand this “experience,” and he saw trouble ahead. He warned that “[a]ny lack of appreciation, or especially any contempt manifested toward their religious opinions or feelings, will wound very deeply.” Indeed, French said, “[i]n some of the deep things of God, we may learn from some of them.” French was worried already that some of Gideon’s Band were not equipped for the work among the contrabands. This would prove to be true in many cases for multiple reasons, but if French had one in mind at this juncture it had to do with incompatibility between the Christianity of some of the missionaries and that of the blacks. Even now he tried to open a face-saving path back home for those who needed it:

So peculiar and great is the work before us all, that a true fitness can be obtained for it only by divine grace, and in the field itself. Some of us may find that, though we have come with honest intent to do a good work, we nevertheless are not adapted to it, and had better retire and give place to others. To leave in such a case, should be regarded as honorable.

Nevertheless, French held out hope for ultimate unity and success that his fellow Gideonites sincerely shared. “We have come from different sections of the country,” he said, “with differences, no doubt, in creeds, but it is hoped that we shall be so united in heart and effort, as to secure perfect unity in the mission, and the greatest possible good to these poor people.”³⁸

Edward Philbrick wrote that French spoke “in his vein of honest, earnest Methodism” and called him “a worthy man,” which was probably the highest praise Philbrick could bestow on someone whose religious style was so foreign. Yet Philbrick, like French, portended trouble ahead among Gideon’s Band, albeit from the opposite

³⁸ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 29.

side. “The more I see of our fellow-passengers and co-workers,” Philbrick wrote, “the more do the party from Boston stand eminent in talent and earnestness, as compared with those from New York, and I can’t help thinking that the former were more carefully selected. . . . I think the result will be shown in the end.” He also concluded that French was “not so practical as Mr. Pierce.” Another Bostonian, William Channing Gannett, was thinking the same thing: “One [Pierce] is eminently practical, the other [French] I fear [is] eminently possessed of the spirit & theory of the work without the hand that takes hold.” Yet Philbrick—and likely other Bostonians who shared his opinions—rebuked himself. “[I]t’s early to form any such opinions, and out of place to draw any comparisons in disparagement of any of our colleagues. We are all yoked together and must pull together.”³⁹

Too early or not, the first weeks on the Sea Islands gave each group plenty of reason to doubt the other. When the missionaries disembarked at Port Royal, Austa French caught sight of a contraband for the first time. According to one gossipy missionary, “she threw her arms around a big fat Negro woman, kissed her, and sobbed out ‘oh my sister!’,” drawing heaps of mockery from soldiers onto the mortified Gideonites. (Austa defended herself by insisting that she did not actually kiss the woman, “for we would not, by so doing, Create An Expectation In Them, and thus Put It in The Power Of Other White Ladies to slight them.”)⁴⁰

³⁹ Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 6; William Channing Gannett, “Steamer Atlantic” journal, March 6, 1862, William Channing Gannett Papers, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY.

⁴⁰ Arthur Sumner to Nina Hartshorn, August 8, 1864, Arthur Sumner Manuscripts, Folder 3615, Penn School Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC; “The Abolition Mission to Port Royal,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 5, 1862; French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 175.

On March 9 the missionaries landed in Beaufort, which was expected to be the operation's nerve center. Gideonites began claiming unoccupied houses that had been thoroughly looted first by abandoned slaves, then by the rapacious army, and finally by the Treasury Department's cotton agents who interpreted their mandate to allow for the confiscation of anything of conceivable value. (Austa French observed among the detritus the scandalous remains of religious magazines that "built [readers] up in the sin of slavery, by silence, and by conveying thereby the assurance, that they might be holy with it"—a sharp censure of the *Guide to Holiness*, the *Beauty's* rival.⁴¹) For missionaries who expected at least rudimentary furnishings, this was an unwelcome situation indeed, and French was quietly blamed for not arranging the lodgings of the women under his care properly. The women were at first distributed among several houses, a few of them temporarily staying with the Frenches at Solomon Peck's. Two days later Mansfield French, Susan Walker, and an army officer assigned to see to the women's comfort found an available mansion next to Pierce's lodgings, and the Frenches and twelve women moved into it together.⁴²

In those close quarters, with deprived ladies struggling to improvise furnishings and something like civilized living, friction was bound to occur. Unsurprisingly, it involved Austa French. Susan Walker joined some missionaries in attending the exotic black religious phenomenon of a "ring shout" and arrived home much later than intended, exhausted. About to collapse into bed, she received two pieces of unwelcome news: first

⁴¹ French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 33.

⁴² Gannett, "Steamer Atlantic" journal, March 20, 1862, William Channing Gannett Papers; Sherwood, "Journal": 12-13; Rupert Sargent Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884* (Cambridge, MA: n.p., 1912), 34, 39-40.

that Mansfield French was about to conduct evening worship and expected her presence, and second that the bed sheets she was promised had just been reassigned to a general's wife. Walker grumpily plopped down for worship, motionless, in the stoic posture in which she generally worshiped even in the times that she felt like it. At the end of the proceedings, as she was leaving the room, Austa French called out in front of the assembly, "Miss Walker, you have hurt my feelings very much by not kneeling at prayer. I hope that in future you will *always* do it, and set such an example to the colored people." Walker bid Austa good night with passive-aggressive sweetness and strode out to find a company of young men from Boston eavesdropping outside the door. After greeting her, the men retired to an "indignation meeting" at their lodgings. The content of their discussion is probably more or less reflected in the diary of William Channing Gannett (who may or may not have been present) a few days later:

Mr. and Mrs. French grew more themselves, one ineffic[ien]t, the other arbitrary. Differ[en]t rules & regulat[io]ns, they tried to promulgate. . . . 7 servants have been employed, 2 waiters in white waistcoats attend at table, everybody & nobody is head. Mr. French has been driving around town, doing much, accomplishing little.⁴³

By itself, this spat is of little import—the unhappy collision of a tired, disappointed, uncomfortable, cramped, and cranky Walker and a bigmouthed, judgmental, and inconsiderate Austa French. In fact, Austa apologized to Walker for this and other insensitivities several weeks later.⁴⁴ The story's significance, however, has to do with the fault line within Gideon's Band that was present from the formation of the

⁴³ Sherwood, "Journal": 16-17; Gannett, "Steamer Atlantic" journal, March 20, 1862, William Channing Gannett Papers.

⁴⁴ Sherwood, "Journal": 35.

group and had already become an open rift just days into the project despite the missionaries' desire for unity. It was not coincidental that the men from Boston kept contemptuous distance *outside* Mansfield French's household worship service instead of participating in it, nor was it random that Austa's dressing-down of Susan Walker had to do with worship style. Granted, the homogeneity of the Boston group compared to the relative heterogeneity of the New Yorkers and the careful selection of the former compared with the rushed recruitment of the latter had much to do with the division. No more than one day after they touched down in Beaufort a soldier learned that the Boston women avoided the New York women, considering them "nothing better than milliners," and that some of the New York women took pride in volunteering for free while the Boston group was paid twenty dollars per month.⁴⁵ Yet the largest source of conflict between the two contingents was sharply differing religious beliefs and practices, even though both sides' commitments to abolition and black uplift were fueled by their respective religious viewpoints.

As has already been seen, the quarrel between Unitarian abolitionists (represented by most of the Boston Gideonites) and evangelical abolitionists (most of the New Yorkers) was as old as the resurgence of antislavery in the 1830s.⁴⁶ Nothing displayed the contrast between the two groups at Port Royal like their encounter with a third stream of abolitionist Christianity: the religious practices of the former slaves themselves. That encounter is of special importance for this study, because it exhibits Mansfield French's

⁴⁵ William Thompson Lusk, *War Letters of William Thompson Lusk, Captain, Assistant Adjutant-General, United States Volunteers, 1861–1863, Afterward M.D., LL.D.* (New York: n.p., 1911), 127-28.

⁴⁶ See pp. 164-66, also 64, 83; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 68-69.

unique suitability for ministering to the former slaves and explains a crucial element of the sizable influence he wielded during this phase of his career.

Slaves worshiped as often as they could, sometimes every night, in a plantation building (sometimes an elderly slave's home) called the Praise House, and the proceedings lasted hours. Worship was highly emotional, demonstrative, participatory, and non-rational. The liturgical practice that fascinated every Northerner who spent time among Sea Island blacks was the ring shout. As a Christian phenomenon in the American South, the shout was a century old and originally involved whites as well as blacks. Preceding the shout was an evangelistic sermon that involved group participation, as congregants punctuated the preacher's cadences with "Glory!" "Amen!" and the like. After the sermon a ring of converted "shouters" danced, rising and falling with a heavy, shuffling beat, sometimes on their knees, while singing various songs (sometimes different ones simultaneously), praying aloud (often short, repeated phrases), and clapping in time. Sometimes dancers became even more energetic and jumped up and down uncontrollably. In the center of the ring, mourners who had been convicted of sin by the sermon knelt or lay prostrate. The purpose of the shout was to coax the mourners into the salvation of spiritual rebirth, which involved as much travail as physical birth. An American Missionary Association representative recounted,

Women go into a perfect frenzy of excitement and roll on the floor for two or three hours together, screaming and crying, "Lord, take me," "Jesus, save me," till, utterly exhausted, they fall asleep, or experience something which they call "coming through," when they jump up in an ecstasy of joy, and shouting "Glory, glory, hallelujah," at the top of their voices till they are hoarse, run all over the house, hugging indiscriminately every man, woman, and child, white or black, that they may come to, and telling them with the most extravagant gesticulations

that “Jesus died for me,” “Jesus is a precious Saviour!”

In the words of historian Ann Taves, “shouters linked ‘extravagant emotions and bodily exercises’ with God's power and presence in the context of group interaction.” For mourners who “came through,” the shout was a critical initiatory ritual into church membership.⁴⁷

Unitarians were appalled by black worship, which they saw as a grotesque, chaotic, noisy babel that smacked of pre-Christian paganism. They considered it a pathology, a natural concomitant of ignorance and soft-headedness, and the most glaring manifestation of the blacks’ barbarity that they had come to the islands to eradicate with civilization. On this point, most evangelicals agreed. The American Missionary Association put these worship practices in the same class as lying, stealing, and libertinism. Yet the evangelicals were also able to see beyond the worship habits that repelled them to a spiritual core that they shared with the blacks. The Unitarians’ religion was intensely, in some cases exclusively, ethical, and their Sunday preaching to the contrabands was composed of moral exhortations about duty and work. As far as they could see, blacks’ religion revealed its worthlessness because it did not improve worshipers’ behavior in those areas at all. But to white evangelicals, the heart of whose religion was saving trust in a fully divine Christ, black Christians were astonishing in the power of their faith. Their hearts and minds were more alive in religious pursuits than in anything else. Even while they worked, they sang songs about a personal Jesus and about

⁴⁷ *History of the American Missionary Association*, 55-56; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 69-70, 82-84; Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 42-43; Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 98-103, 116-17.

heaven as a tangible place as close as the next plantation. Their songs proclaimed great confidence that they were soon to enter paradise, unafraid of death. They prayed as if God was right next to them. One of the evangelical missionaries, an ordained minister, felt ashamed of himself when he heard a black preacher named Harry: "Here was an unlearned man, who could not read, telling of the love of Christ, of Christian faith and duty in a way which I have not learned." The Frenches recounted similar stories in the *Beauty of Holiness*:

A very able minister, our pastor, said: "Never . . . did I see any thing like such direct communication between souls and God. Never did I imagine souls could be, or were, so taught directly by God, without the written word, or other ordinary means. . . ." Another says: "The scriptural similarity of their expressions to ancient saints, when there was no open vision or written word, is amazing, as 'God said to me,' 'God answered me,' 'God told me.' And the fulfillment of these assurances they feel from God, are not less remarkable. One said: 'In a battle, when every one was falling around me, I asked the Lord to save me, and he told me he would, and I knew he would, and he did, though I was almost the only one left, not a hair of my head was injured.' "

For the freedmen's part, they found whites' religion equally strange, as if they knew God quite well in theory but were entirely unacquainted with him in substance—and moreover they cited examples of shouting, dancing, and falling in the presence of God in the Bible to back up their actions.⁴⁸

What made Mansfield French a truly unusual figure on the Sea Islands was that he was able to go beyond his fellow evangelicals with their mixture of disapproval and wonder. French did not speak a word of criticism against the contrabands' Christianity,

⁴⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 82-87; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 458-62; *History of the American Missionary Association*, 55-56; George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*, Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 286-87; "Editorial Miscellany," *BH* 13, no. 3 (March 1862): 102; "Editorial Sketches," *BH* 13, no. 5 (May 1862): 163-65; "The Hidden Ones," *BH* 13, no. 6 (June 1862): 195-97.

because in large part their Christianity was his. French's evangelical colleagues experienced spiritual power in corporate worship most intensely in the solemn urban prayer meetings of the 1857-58 revival. By contrast, French's spiritual high point came in rural camp meetings that were themselves a throwback to an older style that shared roots with slave worship. Compare the foregoing description of the ring shout with French's account of the camp meeting at "Mariotts" in 1844.⁴⁹ Even though the way French ended one camp meeting service was not precisely the same in form or function to the ring shout, both involved a circular procession with singing punctuated by boisterous shouts of praise following a passionate sermon intended to produce conversion, and in both settings sudden falling and other bodily motions were seen as evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence. Although it is unlikely that French participated in a ring shout himself—it would have been so shocking to the Northerners if he had that it surely would have been documented somewhere—French did not see the practice as savagery but as holy ground that he had trodden himself.

Like other evangelicals, French was deeply affected by the contrabands' faith. He reported to the officers of the AMA,

In woman & in the children, are to be found the materials, of the superstructure of their future greatness & usefulness. The great majority are pious. Their hearts have an education in the knowledge of Christian experience, that may well be coveted by many whose mental culture bears no comparison with the dark minds of most of them. Their talk as christians, often sparkles with rich gems. Last Sabbath, after preaching to a Congregation of probably one hundred & fifty belonging mostly to one plantation, I called on them to rise and speak of the dealings of God with their souls. It was soon evident to the ladies, who accompanied me, one from Boston & two from New York, that they were indeed listening to some of the Johns & Marys, who are favored with the Master's

⁴⁹ See pp. 129-31.

special smiles. As they spoke of their trust in the Savior, his assurances, by the application of the promises, to their hearts, that “a good time was coming,” when their own vines & fig trees would cast their shadows around them in quietness & safety [cf. 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4], & no more partings of families, be known, our hearts dissolved in sympathy & gratitude in their behalf.⁵⁰

There are several noteworthy elements in this anecdote. French’s intense concern for family reunion and integrity, which has already been noted, will be examined more thoroughly later. We will also explore the consequences of his conclusion that “The great majority are pious” (i.e., converted) and also his desires relative to “*their own vines & fig trees*.” Meanwhile, French’s attentiveness to women and comfort interacting with them on a spiritual plane, unusual for men of his age, shines through. Once again, his years in female academies and Methodist meetings where both sexes testified shaped whom he saw and how he saw them. French also reveals his conviction—alien to his Unitarian colleagues—that faith is superior to reason and that spiritual apprehension of Christ is the true knowledge, a conviction he held from his teens⁵¹ but that grew more pronounced in his Methodist years. Finally, this story displays the success French had preaching to blacks that he first exhibited at Fortress Monroe. It was entirely natural for him to call hearers to testify to “the dealings of God with their souls,” and it was equally natural for them to respond to his call.⁵²

A special bond was quickly forming between the Sea Islands’ blacks and Mansfield French. They recognized him as one of their own—in a manner of speaking, a black preacher—and he saw them as the people of God. Moreover, as will be examined in

⁵⁰ Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 18, 1862, AMA 115127.

⁵¹ See pp. 64-66.

⁵² Cf. “Glance at Fortress Monroe,” *BH* 13, no. 2 (February 1862): 69.

depth below, French and the contrabands shared the same biblical-typological outlook.⁵³

They understood each other. Of the many Northern whites with whom Port Royal's blacks became acquainted through the course of the war, they only came to trust one person like they trusted Mansfield French—perhaps in part because of French's own faith in that man.⁵⁴

French's influence among the contrabands was peerless. Few if any of his comrades understood the reason why, and many became troubled by it. When Unitarian types listened to French preach, they heard the notes but not the music. When French preached to a white audience, the 9th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, on "Daniel and his trials, his powers of resistance and godly life," Susan Walker considered it a "good talk," but it "could hardly be called a sermon" although it was "excellent of its kind." After hearing a trio of evangelicals that included French preach to contrabands, Reuben Tomlinson remarked that the preaching met "the peculiar wants & vices of the people in a very effectual manner." However, "Mr French as is natural to him was too Methodistical in matter & manner, appealing too much to the Religious sentiment of the people & not aiming sufficiently to strengthen them in principle and purpose." What Tomlinson could not see was that "appealing to the Religious sentiment" was precisely the way that French established the common ground from which he could address the contrabands' "peculiar wants and vices." The vices Tomlinson had in mind were probably summarized by government investigators in 1863, who wrote that although the blacks' religion produced

⁵³ See pp. 280-85.

⁵⁴ See pp. 262-66.

some sterling qualities (“submission, humility,” and “reliance on Providence” among them), it had slight “effect in checking lying, thieving, incontinence, and similar offenses. A slave has seldom any distinct moral perception that he ought to speak the truth, or to respect private property in the case of a person he dislikes.” Whether and why these assertions about slaves’ behavior and religion were true are far beyond this study. What is important is that the investigators also noted that “the religion of the South Carolinian slave was emotional” and that “*these people are easily reached through their affections*” (emphasis mine). The gulf between slave religion and Yankee Protestant morality was large, but Mansfield French was uniquely able to bridge it.⁵⁵

For the moment, however, despite the rocky start between Unitarian and evangelical Gideonites and the former group’s mixed reviews of his preaching, French retained the personal goodwill of many Bostonians and their allies, at least of the women. French was greatly impressed with Walker and desired her to serve as his secretary, but she balked. “I think he wishes a grand *Report* and will publish it. I do not wish to be mixed up with [the] N[ew] Y[ork] association for there is no congeniality of taste and sentiment.” Nevertheless, she believed him to be “truly religious. He has a kind gentle nature and is filled with earnest desire to do good. He is invariably kind, with heart and spirit all right.” Yet she registered the same concern about French’s practicality that Edward Philbrick and William Channing Gannett had two weeks earlier: “His business

⁵⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 181; Sherwood, “Journal”: 17; Reuben Tomlinson to James Miller McKim, August 18, 1862, May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection, #4601, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1899), III, 3:436. In these years Methodists in general were subject to such criticism even from other evangelicals; see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), 86.

capacity and executive talent are small compared with his large benevolence and deep religious sentiment. I fear the want of business talent may lead to some difficulties in the organization he purposes—nous verrons [we shall see]. . . .”⁵⁶

On French’s side, despite continuing to get along with Unitarians in public, he harbored criticisms in private, which in May he shared vocally with Salmon P. Chase. French “thinks the Unitarians don’t get hold of the work in the right way,” Chase confided to his diary. “The negroes are mostly Baptists, and like emotional religion better than rational, so called. They . . . cannot understand a religion that is not founded on [Jesus’] Divinity.”⁵⁷

Pulling Together

The tension between the Boston and New York contingents did not escape the attention of Edward L. Pierce, who decided that the best way to handle the problem was by discreetly positioning the missionaries so that representatives of the two cities would have little contact with each other. Most of the New York men Pierce assigned to manage plantations on Port Royal Island, where Beaufort was, “so as to be nearer Mr French.” Most of the Massachusetts men were distributed over Ladies, Edisto, and St. Helena Islands. Word of the altercation between Susan Walker and Austa French traveled quickly through Gideon’s Band. Two days later Pierce, who was still happy to keep the women under French’s governance and away from himself, nevertheless invited the three Ohio women and one of the Bostonians to relocate out of the Frenches’ crowded henhouse (as

⁵⁶ Sherwood, “Journal”: 16, 18.

⁵⁷ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:333.

Pierce likely saw it) to the plantation on St. Helena that he made his new headquarters. To Walker, who coveted space, this was salvation. She did not want to hurt kindly Mansfield French's feelings, but she was not sure how much longer she could last under his roof, and she was confident that she would be more useful on St. Helena anyway.⁵⁸

The removal of the four did not solve the overall problem, however. French was convinced that encounters between black women and Northern white female instructors were critical to the project and urged the AMA to send more women under the National Freedman's Relief Association's auspices: "Woman can touch cords in woman's heart," he wrote, "[that] man has no power to either discover, or if discovered, to play upon." By this time Philadelphia had started its own Port Royal Committee and had begun sending women and men south. As more women from the North (including the famed Harriet Tubman) were arriving at the Frenches' door, there were enough squabbles that French had to defend himself against rising murmurs that his insistence on including women in the missionary force was not a good idea after all. In a letter to Chase French repeated his conviction that the Lord had directed that decision despite the warnings of many of his friends, and he tried to put a positive spin on things. "There has been harmony of action and only a little friction on the feelings of some of our ladies who are rather positive in their temperament," French insisted. "Indeed how could any one suppose that so many good angels could be put together without brushing their wings occasionally."⁵⁹

French also believed that the real reason that he and his "angels" endured

⁵⁸ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:160; Sherwood, "Journal": 18.

⁵⁹ Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 18, 1862, AMA 115127; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 71; Lewis Tappan to M. French, March 17, 1862, FFP; M. French to Salmon P. Chase, April 15, 1862; FFP.

criticism was more sinister. French wanted to bring women of character to Port Royal for two reasons. One was to “instruct the [black] women in all motherly, wifely & sisterly duties” on the assumption that the contrabands were unaware of them. The other was to “put a barrier between corrupt & corrupting men”—that is, Union soldiers—and “these helpless [black] females.” It should be remembered that sexual abuse at the hands of the army was one element of the humanitarian crisis that called the Port Royal Experiment into being. How French thought the pious white ladies of the North would form a “barrier” against such depravity is uncertain, but French and others assumed that female slaves had been conditioned by their masters to acquiesce to the sexual advances of any white man or else risk severe punishment. If black women kept up that habit with a host of armed men prowling nearby, adultery and promiscuity would necessarily run riot. That in turn would demolish French’s fragile project of establishing stable families and would “blast . . . the happiness of many a happy household.” Most likely, keeping the assumption that morality and education went together, French saw this as an area of ignorance that required education the same as “motherly, wifely & sisterly duties.” This sensitive subject could only be taught by mature, chaste, civilized women. French “only regretted that I had not three times as many.”⁶⁰

In fact, black women did not need literacy or white instructors to know their family duties. French bore unwitting testimony to this truth every time he pointed to the throngs of former slaves desperately trying to reunite with family members who had been sold away. Herbert G. Gutman demonstrated that most slaves lived in robust nuclear and

⁶⁰ M. French to Salmon P. Chase, April 15, 1862; FFP; “Aid for Contrabands at Port Royal,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1862; Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*, 13-14.

extended families (although constantly in jeopardy of permanent disruption by sale). He also showed that although many slaves indeed faced an awful dilemma when approached by lustful masters and overseers, that did not mean that they accepted abject sexual submission to white men as normal. Yet if French was wrong about contrabands' ignorance, he may not have been wrong about predation by Union soldiers. Moreover, if complaints about Gideonite women came mainly from the army, there may have been some truth to French's contention that if the missionaries limited the contrabands' sexual availability "they would meet a *torrent of opposition*." The missionaries may have provided genuine support for the contrabands and encouragement that if they held their ground against sexual intimidation, exploitative soldiers would be brought to account. In any case, French was certain that "[t]he terrible storm of foul slander, has only proved the necessity of the mission."⁶¹

It did not, however, make French's house any bigger or snuff out intramural discord. It also did not help contraband women on distant plantations for the female missionaries to be clustered under French's watchful eye in Beaufort. Pierce's observation of the four women at his compound and the islands' increasing orderliness must have made him more comfortable distributing the women away from close guardianship in April. As with the men, the New Yorkers generally remained near French at Beaufort while the Boston women were distributed further afield. Soon French's house was empty—in mid-June he wrote to Austa (who had recently returned home to New

⁶¹ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), 46–50, 80–84; M. French to Salmon P. Chase, April 15, 1862; FFP.

York) that “Our family is broken up”—and he moved on to lodge with someone else.⁶²

Relative distance between Bostonians and New Yorkers did not eradicate their rivalry, but for the moment it receded from center stage. Yet breathing room was not the only thing that brought a measure of peace and unity. Getting into the work itself reminded Gideon’s Band of what the missionaries came for, and as Edward S. Philbrick hoped, they “pulled together” with a will.

A significant support to cooperation was that, despite evangelicals’ and Unitarians’ sharp differences about the person of Christ, the nature of salvation, and the goals of public worship, their ethical outlooks were strikingly similar, which of course is what brought them to Port Royal in the first place. Evangelicals measured the efficacy of the 1857-58 revival by its ethical fruit, both in the personal lives of those touched and in its impact on society and commerce. As Mansfield French had voiced to Lajos Kossuth, God’s law was encapsulated in love of neighbor and indeed of all being. Not only Northern evangelicals broadly but also liberal Unitarians agreed with that assertion wholeheartedly. J. Miller McKim, one of the leaders of Philadelphia’s Port Royal Committee, visited the islands in June and attended Sabbath exercises at the Brick (Baptist) Church on St. Helena Island. To his great satisfaction, McKim saw superintendents and teachers from many denominations simultaneously teaching Sunday School to groups of contrabands in perfect harmony. Listing the names of a Massachusetts evangelical Congregationalist, two Unitarians, a Presbyterian, an unidentified female Baptist, an unidentified secularist raised as a liberal Quaker, and

⁶² Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:160; Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 7-8; M. French to A. French, June 13, 1862, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 23, 1862, FFP.

Methodist Mansfield French, McKim concluded, “Here were men and women who at home belonged to diverse and often conflicting sects, all engaged heartily and fraternally in inculcating upon their hearers the fundamental doctrines of a common religion.”⁶³

It was no coincidence that McKim saw Gideonites working as one teaching Sunday School. Of all the endeavors of the Port Royal Experiment, none was as successful or as satisfying to the Northern missionaries as education. Northern visitors throughout occupied portions of the Confederacy abundantly reported the eagerness of blacks of all ages to learn anything and everything as well as their facility for doing so quickly. Observers detected no difference between blacks and whites in ability to learn; as blacks’ intellectual capacity was strongly doubted by most Americans and sincerely questioned by most of the rest, this was no minor discovery. Blacks knew that knowledge, especially literacy, lay at the root of whites’ power over them, and they were highly motivated to even the score. As a happy coincidence, teaching was the one thing that virtually every Gideonite did well and enjoyed. By the end of 1862 “[a]pproximately 2,500 children were being taught [in the Port Royal area], and many more adults were gaining a rudimentary English education through formally organized classes or by private arrangement with the generous teachers.” French commonly saw “forty or fifty field hands, men & women, & women too, with babes in their arms, assembled in a rude room, learning to read.”⁶⁴

Supervising the educational aspect was French’s responsibility, for which his

⁶³ Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 85-88; see pp. 173-74 above; J. M. McKim, “The Freed Men of South Carolina,” *The Liberator* 30 (July 25, 1862): 120.

⁶⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 79-81, 167, 187-92; Mansfield French to Whiting, April 2, 1862, AMA H5128.

years in Ohio had amply prepared him, and although the enterprise was blessed with advantages that other parts of the mission lacked, he deserves some credit for its success. Interestingly, however, despite the unity around teaching blacks to read and write, factionalism still lurked in its oversight. Throughout 1862 and 1863 French made frequent requests to the American Missionary Association and the National Freedmen's Relief Association for school books, visual aids, other educational materials, and above all more teachers. Yet no correspondence survives (probably because it never existed) between French and Boston's Educational Committee or Philadelphia's Port Royal Committee—despite that the latter shipped a prefabricated schoolhouse that was erected on St. Helena Island and dubbed the Penn School.⁶⁵

Another major aspect of the mission was humanitarian relief. The government was now distributing rations to the people through the plantation superintendents until the contrabands' food crops came to maturity. Superintendents also distributed clothing, yet French and his team of women shouldered a fair amount of this duty as well. In addition to passing out clothes made (and usually previously worn) in the North, French quickly established an "Industrial School" where female missionaries taught black women to sew and assemble clothes from pieces sent from New York. In less than a month after the

⁶⁵ Examples of the many letters between French and the AMA and NFRA about education are Mansfield French to Whiting, April 2, 1862, AMA H5128; Mansfield French to unknown, July 27, 1862, AMA H5151; Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, January 14, 1863, AMA H5174; Charles C. Leigh to M. French, January 29, 1863, FFP; Charles C. Leigh to M. French, September 29, 1863, FFP. Another letter from September 29, 1863 that refers to a "Superintendent of Education for our Association" being sent to Port Royal suggests that French was being distracted by other duties and interests and yet expressed some jealousy over his title as the supervisor of education. See Francis George Shaw to M. French, Sept. 29, 1863, FFP; pp. 335-37 above.

Gideonites' arrival, seventy students were making clothing for the islands' contrabands.⁶⁶

Women were able to enter the cabins and get more intimately acquainted with families' needs. Blunt encounters with poverty shored up the Gideonites' abolitionist convictions even more. "A more needy field, I never beheld," French wrote to the AMA on April 2. "Yesterday with three ladies, I visited two or three distant plantations on this island. The condition of the people & their cabins furnished to my mind conclusive evidence, that slavery is an outrage on all human feelings, a sin against man, and a direct insult offered to God." Therefore, French and his colleagues sought to go beyond feeding and clothing contrabands and improve their living conditions. He reasoned, "Give a colored woman in the North means & she will decorate her person, & we find the same thing is done here. Purify & decorate a cabin & the woman who owns the next one will try to do the same, if means can be had." So French selected one cabin on each of twenty-four plantations inhabited by "a woman of as much taste for tidiness and order as possible." Then, with articles sent by the National Freedman's Relief Association, French (or more likely his associates) whitewashed the cabin's interior, installed a four-pane, sixteen-by-twenty-inch window, and redecorated the home with a breakfast table, a mattress with three sheets, two pillows with two sets of pillow cases, a mirror, a washbasin, two towels, and a few bars of soap. French expected the material aspirations (i.e., envy) of the woman's neighbors to do the rest, motivating the contrabands to spend their wages on their own home improvements. "They seem to have their backs fully turned on slavery & their hearts set on freedom," French judged. "They begin therefore to

⁶⁶ Mansfield French to Whiting, April 2, 1862, AMA H5128; Mansfield French to Simeon S. Jocelyn, April 17, 1862, AMA H5133; "Letter from Rev. M. French," *The Weekly Anglo-African*, April 26, 1862.

seek after everything that belongs to freedom.” He concluded that these furnishings “must have a salutary effect in their social habits & moral natures.”⁶⁷

French’s home improvement project and what he thought it would accomplish signals that the efforts of Gideon’s Band to educate the blacks and alleviate their poverty were more than piecemeal outworkings of the ethic of love. Both the Unitarians and the evangelicals (who generally, like French, had Yankee roots) saw themselves as “colonists” on soil that was home to an essentially unjust and immoral culture long entwined with slavery. This clash-of-civilizations viewpoint had nested among Yankees for decades. Toward the end of the war it was articulated by abolitionist Wendell Phillips:

The Civil War, [Phillips] said, was not just a struggle arising from disagreements over slavery, party platforms, and the nature of the Union. It was . . . an ultimate collision of two irreconcilable cultures. . . . The North, he stated, exemplified “the civilization of the nineteenth century” with its complete adherence to the “equal and recognized manhood” of “free labor, free speech, open Bibles, the welcome rule of the majority [and] the Declaration of Independence.” The South, in entire antithesis, contained anachronisms which recalled “the days of Queen Mary and the Inquisition.” It was an “aristocracy of the skin,” intolerant of free inquiry, hostile to self-rule, wedded to “violence,” blighted by “ignorance,” mired in “idleness,” and dedicated to the axiom that “one third of the race is born bootied and spurred, the other two thirds ready for that third to ride.”

The war’s deepest meaning, Phillips emphasized, could be understood only if seen as part of a much longer struggle for a common republican nationality in America. True peace could be achieved, therefore, not by signing treaties or by enacting laws, but by “carrying Massachusetts to Carolina,” by applying “Northern civilization all over the South.” Every inherited privilege, every form of parochialism and patriarchy, must be uprooted from the Southern landscape. In their place, a class of independent yeomen and artisans must arise, free laborers whose productive efforts supported common schools, free churches, and democratic institutions of all sorts. “We must take up the South and organize it anew,” Phillips urged, “to absorb six millions of ignorant, embittered, bedeviled Southerners [black and white] and transmute them into honest, decent, educated

⁶⁷ Mansfield French to Whiting, April 2, 1862, AMA H5128; Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, June 23, 1862, AMA H5145.

Christian mechanics, worthy to be brothers of New England Yankees.”

The deepest thinkers among the abolitionists perceived that if the root cause of the Civil War was not only deeper than rival interpretations of the Constitution but deeper than slavery itself, then even the legal extirpation of slavery, if achieved, would not bring peace. Only the homogenization of American culture—the wholesale replacement of regional cultures, especially in the South, with Yankee civilization—would bring true Union and lasting peace. As it happened, their archenemies, the Southern planters, essentially agreed with their analysis—reversing, of course, which culture was the barbaric one—and this drove them to secession.⁶⁸

Individual Yankees of Gideon’s Band had not necessarily thought through all of this, but their labors revealed that they were acting according to the logic. To them education was not about being equipped to thrive in a job market or about self-actualization or even about the love of learning. For evangelicals it was about being able to read and understand the Bible. For all kinds of respectable Yankees it was about being worthy of being entrusted with self-government in a democratic republic. Yet it was also about the virtues, mores, and status of the middle class: in Margaret A. Nash’s words, “Industriousness, hard work, punctuality, and sobriety . . . self-improvement, appropriate use of leisure time, and ideas about what it meant to be cultured” as well as cleanliness and the furnishings, diet, and manners of well-regulated, middle-class Yankee homes. This is what the Gideonites had come to “lift” blacks up to and what the rural South with

⁶⁸ *First Annual Report*, 1; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 42-43; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed., Eric Foner, consulting ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 199-201; Richard N. Current, *Northernizing the South*, Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures 26 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1983), 54-57.

its extremes of wealth and poverty was lacking. The form and substance of civilization required and enforced by the Southern elite simply could not survive the war if Northern arms allowed benefactors and investors to create a vibrant middle class out of the vast, biracial, rural proletariat.⁶⁹

Yankee Evangelicals and Unitarians in Gideon's Band shared common ground in these cultural and class assumptions, but they also were increasingly able to get along for a much humbler and more practical reason: a number of them who were unfit for duty had returned home, which relieved tension all around. In midsummer McKim reported,

Of the ninety odd who went out last spring, quite a number proved incompetent. They had not gone from the right motive, nor were they of the right spirit. Some went hoping the climate would be good for their health, or from a spirit of romance, or to see a semi-tropical country with its peculiar productions, or in a spirit of sectarian religious zeal, or from some other motive not essentially unselfish, and in harmony with an all-pervading desire to be useful. Such people soon get tired; or their coadjutors get tired of them. There was a great deal of work to be done; and to them the life was one of dull and monotonous drudgery.

These seemed to be hurriedly recruited New Yorkers for the most part, but the Philadelphian McKim was too discreet to expose the rivalry between the factions.⁷⁰

Yet nothing has a way of making allies like common enemies, so perhaps the most powerful stimulant to evangelical-Unitarian cooperation was antagonism from a range of outside opponents. Hostility from elements of the army has already been mentioned, ranging from deprivations against blacks to withholding of assistance to practical jokes,

⁶⁹ Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 101–4; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 185–87.

⁷⁰ McKim, "Freed Men," *The Liberator* 30 (July 25, 1862): 120. In 1905 William E. Park, a rare evangelical in the Boston group and son of Andover theologian Edwards Amasa Park, remembered "mere adventurers of weak purpose and poor ability" from Boston as well as "very unwise and ill adapted" missionaries from New York. His balanced assessment may have been borne of exceptional objectivity or of a split affinity to the two factions, or perhaps after more than forty years he was just being kind to the New Yorkers. See Park, "The First Schools for Our Freedmen," *Outlook*, July 1, 1905, 594.

as when soldiers spooked noncombatant Gideonites by telling them that rebels intent on the massacre of missionaries were near.⁷¹

Other difficulties came from the Treasury Department agents with the task of securing the 1861 cotton harvest. Although Pierce, true to form, was careful to speak graciously of Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds, whom Chase appointed to supervise the job, the two men had clashed from Pierce's first foray to Port Royal. Reynolds hired contrabands, who by rights fell under Pierce's jurisdiction, creating one of the many conflicts of clashing priorities, muddled lines of authority, and lack of cooperation that plagued the Port Royal Experiment. Just weeks after Gideon's Band arrived, French wrote confidentially to Chase about the situation. Although Reynolds had welcomed French as the supervisor of the educational and humanitarian mission, Reynolds and his employees resisted Pierce's authority to manage the plantations. Moreover, Reynolds' subordinates, possibly without his knowledge, withheld the contrabands' wages, and some marked up the supplies they sold to the freedpeople, provoking some workers to anger at the government. Obliquely hinting at the possibility that Chase might wish to relieve Reynolds of duty, French suggested qualities that would be valuable in Reynolds' successor "if you have occasion to appoint" one. "I suggest for your own protection," French wrote smoothly, "as well as that of the colored laborer, *you know fully*, how matters are, before you consent to a settlement." French's overriding concern was that the contrabands be paid what they deserved, and he made his motives plain: "You see, I stand

⁷¹ Lusk, *War Letters*, 127-28.

fully in sympathy with the negro, but no more so, I think, than justice demands.”⁷²

This letter from early in the mission marks an important departure in French’s relationship with Chase. French’s communications to the secretary to this point had been composed first of adulation, then of practical details. Yet here French took his first furtive step in using his friendship with Chase to manipulate circumstances at Port Royal toward French’s desired ends. French was certain that his sub rosa criticism of Reynolds to his superior was right—“I purpose, the Lord being my helper to make no tracks in this field which I shall ever desire to cover”—but he still preferred that Chase keep his communiqué a secret. “If I can be of any service to you,” French concluded, “please use me.” By mid-April French had reason to believe that Gideon’s Band had “gained the victory” over the cotton agents; with their operation complete, they soon departed, and soon not only Reynolds but also his position was terminated.⁷³

Besides opposition close by, French and the Gideonites were the target of plenty of opprobrium in the Northern press.⁷⁴ Some believed that blacks were intrinsically incapable of improvement and that anyone who tried to prove otherwise was on a fool’s errand. “Unless the reformer can, with his emancipation scheme, introduce new and superhuman industry, economy, thrift and perseverance into the negro,” opined the *New York Journal of Commerce*, “it will result that he will not earn a support for himself alone, much less for his family. . . . [It will] plunge the South into the depths of

⁷² Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 32-35; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:145-47.

⁷³ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:148; Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Annual Report*, 9-10.

poverty.”⁷⁵ Conservative papers derided French as “the reverend gentleman whom no congregation enough appreciates at home—so that he is quartered in part upon the Treasury at Port Royal, and in part upon the misplaced charity of persons here at home.” “The Mr. and Mrs. Frenches, and other ‘Abolition’ sisters and saints,” alleged the *New York Herald*,

are to educate the negroes and negresses up to cutting their masters’ throats, as in Hayti—in case South Carolina is ever restored to the Union! . . . Now, while we . . . think, that, in due time, they ought to be colonized elsewhere, as *freemen*, we shrink with horror from any such “education” as . . . missionaries of the Devil, not of the Gospel, here propose. . . . This Port Royal business is not in Gospel, but in bloody hands—and that “blood,” “BLOOD,” “BLOOD,” is its ultimate meaning, not the peaceful Gospel of Christ.⁷⁶

As painful as this castigation may have been, it was expected. Unexpected were some prominent voices from the *abolitionist* camp that publicly criticized the Port Royal mission. Some antislavery advocates like Wendell Phillips said that the experiment was misguided because benevolence reinforced the notion that blacks could not take care of themselves and therefore made emancipation less likely to become law. They also feared that such efforts would eventually drain Northerners’ goodwill. Although abolitionists like Phillips did not grasp that the material conditions on abandoned plantations required a good deal of Northern whites’ help at the outset, some were also appropriately concerned that blacks had simply exchanged one set of tyrannical masters for a new set of benevolent ones. The ex-slaves’ own lingo and behavior demonstrated that they were functioning this way; these were hard habits to break. Some of the Gideonites themselves

⁷⁵ Quoted in *The Liberator*, January 3, 1862, in turn quoted in McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 135.

⁷⁶ “The Abolition Mission to Port Royal,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 5, 1862.

recognized the problem. “The danger now seems to be—not that we shall be called enthusiasts, abolitionists, philanthropists, but cotton agents, negro-drivers, oppressors,” wrote Laura Towne:

The mischief has been that on this side of the water, on these islands, the gentlemen have been determined to make the negroes show what they can do in the way of cotton, unwhipped. But they have only changed the mode of compulsion. They *force* men to prove they are fit to be free men by holding a tyrant’s power over them.⁷⁷

In time, French would come to share Towne’s concern acutely.

Meanwhile, Gideonites sought to get their own version of happenings in South Carolina before the eyes of the Northern reading public.⁷⁸ Among the several missionaries and teachers engaged in this pursuit, Austa French stands tall. During her Southern sabbatical from the *Beauty of Holiness*, with the magazine operating under son Winchell’s guidance, Austa diligently composed an account of the mission to Port Royal and the evidence that former slaves gave her of the loathsomeness of slavery. The eventual result was a book, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves, or the Port Royal Mission*, released in July with Winchell French listed as the publisher.⁷⁹ The book was thick with the high-pitched zeal, pathos, and sentimentality that characterized all of Austa’s prose. Willie Lee Rose noted that “[i]n the straight tradition of the sensational literature of abolitionism,” this first-ever published account of the Port Royal Experiment “exposed the worst horrors of bondage and related an incredible number of atrocities, a

⁷⁷ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 132-37; Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 55.

⁷⁸ Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 68.

⁷⁹ A. M. French, *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves, or The Port Royal Mission*, ePub (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862). For its publication see M. French to A. French, June 13, 1862, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 23, 1862, FFP; W. French to M. French, July 7, 1862, FFP.

large proportion of them having to do in some way with sex.” Rose’s characterization is apt, but the last observation is inaccurate; in fact the number of examples of sexual abuse is dwarfed by the number involving sadistic corporal punishment.⁸⁰

Slavery in South Carolina is not the source to consult for an objective and comprehensive study of its subject. That does not mean, however, that there was not a significant amount of truth to the outrages Austa reported. The following year, when the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission sent by the War Department to tour occupied parts of the Confederacy submitted its preliminary report, the commissioners judged that with such a large proportion of slaves in the population and being so far removed from the rest of civilization, slavery “appears to have run out nearer to its logical consequences” in the South Carolina lowcountry than anywhere else. A slave from North Carolina who had attained skill as a blacksmith was moderately contented in bondage there, but one month after being moved to South Carolina “he determined to risk his life in an attempt to escape.” Elderly slaves testified that conditions in the previous three decades were much more severe than they had been before 1830. The cruelty shown by the average master in the South Carolina lowcountry was without parallel in the rest of the South, as were the ignorance and backwardness of the slaves. In addition, Austa was not the only Gideonite to hear horror stories. Susan Walker, shocked by accounts of “anle fetters, collar and mouth piece and terrible cowhidings and finally the hangings and shootings by slave masters to prevent escape of servants” protested that these tales surely could not be true. An elderly slave replied, “Heigh, you no bleve me, heigh, worse

⁸⁰ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 55.

en dat.”⁸¹

Austa and Mansfield were convinced that Austa’s book had to be published and read because, as a minister-friend of theirs asserted, “The Bane of this Country is the Pro-Slaveryism of the North. That is what influences the President.” The Frenches believed that “this Pro-Slaveryism would not exist, did the North know that *awful Institution as it is*. And did they know the character of the Colored as it is, the prejudice which is the foundation of this hatred of them, or of fear of them, or of indifference to them, and of *our national sin respecting them*, would vanish.” Although Rose’s claim about the sexual subject matter in Austa’s book is an exaggeration, it is true that Austa took special care to record abuse suffered by slave women in order to arouse the indignant sympathies of Northern women. On the theory that behind every strong man is a strong woman, Austa was sure that “if we can get the strong influence at the fireside right, all will soon be done.” Austa’s confidence had a basis in the Holiness Movement pattern of wives leading husbands into the blessing of perfect love, as exemplified by her own marriage.⁸²

Slavery in South Carolina met with mixed reactions. Port Royal’s Unitarians, who had acquired a potent dislike for Austa French, were scornful. One missionary called it “one of the most ridiculous books I ever looked into.” Evangelical reviewers back home were not entirely pleased with it either. “Its literary execution is unskillful, and the [pictorial] illustrations are simply lamentable,” panned the *Independent*. Nevertheless, the editor praised the book for its content. “[T]hese formal matters are quite lost sight of in

⁸¹ *War of the Rebellion*, III, 3:433-34; Sherwood, “Journal”: 34.

⁸² Advertisement for *Slavery in South Carolina* (originally appearing inside cover of *Beauty of Holiness*), FFP; French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, ix; see pp. 190-91 above.

the simplicity and truth and graphic force of the details which it accumulates, about the life, manner, and mental habits and condition of slaves and slavery.” Other progressive evangelical periodicals chimed in similar endorsements. “None will read the book without having a feeling that such an institution as slavery ought to die,” asserted the *Northwestern Christian Advocate*.⁸³

Meanwhile, as Gideon’s Band labored under opposition from many sides, they were cheered by gaining two friends with stars on their shoulders. At the end of March General David Hunter arrived to take command of the army’s ambitiously named Department of the South. Hunter had strong abolitionist instincts and the dubious virtue of boldness (that is, acting without thinking). On April 13 the general peremptorily declared the contrabands in his district legally free and began forming a black regiment under white officers, the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry. The Gideonites were elated. Unfortunately, few men volunteered, so without warning or explanation Hunter drafted every able-bodied black man on the islands for military training, which caused predictable fear and anguish both for those taken and those left behind. Pierce was outraged. Hunter had stuck his powerful hand into Pierce’s realm of authority, which was bad enough; he had used compulsion that terrified the contrabands, which was worse; and worst of all he took the strongest laborers in the middle of cotton planting, which had already started too late and was racing the seasonal clock. Hunter partly yielded to Pierce’s protest and allowed the plowmen and foremen to go home. After a training

⁸³ William F. Allen, “Diary,” January 10, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers, 1775-1950, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; “Editor’s Book Table,” *The Independent*, October 9, 1862, 3; clipping headed “General Orders” [from the *Free South?*], FFP.

period of a few weeks the rest were allowed to return, but some remained and enlisted.⁸⁴

A month after Hunter's arrival a second general was appointed to duty in the Department of the South. As the extent of the size and complexity of affairs in Port Royal became apparent—as well as the friction between Treasury Department employees and the military—authority over the entire operation, military and civilian, became consolidated in the hands of the War Department under Edwin M. Stanton with hopes of improving coordination. Stanton appointed the former chief quartermaster on the Sea Islands, Rufus Saxton, to serve as “military governor” and oversee the welfare of the contrabands and the missionaries working among them as well as the success of the cotton growing. Saxton replaced Edward L. Pierce, who was leaving the mission that he launched in order to return to his private affairs after submitting a final voluminous report to Salmon P. Chase. (By this time, Pierce had long since come around to see the value of female missionaries, and French was jealous that in Pierce's report he “has taken all the credit for the women's mission to himself.” French hoped to get his own report published that would show his contributions.) Saxton's appointment strengthened the security of the work at Port Royal by putting it under the supervision of a military officer with the authority and rank (the captain was brevetted a brigadier general) to protect the mission from disruption by the army as long as he and the departmental commander could cooperate. With the shift of control, the War Department also put the plantation superintendents on its own payroll, leaving to the Northern benevolent societies the task

⁸⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 122-25.

of recruiting and subsidizing the teachers.⁸⁵

Massachusetts-born, abolitionist-reared, and West Point-educated, Saxton was ideally suited for his task, combining the power of the uniform with the sentiments of the Gideonites. When he first met Mansfield French in January or February, he had already bent considerable thought toward the contrabands' well-being and saw further ahead as to its practical requirements than perhaps anyone else had dared. Saxton shared his deliberations with French in a letter of February 10:

[T]he great question of their future comes up to the mind of the patriot, the philanthropist and the Christian—a great question for this age to answer. Unless some means are provided whereby they can be taught to support themselves, they are likely to become a heavy burden upon the Government. They need a firm, true hand to educate and direct them in their new career of freedom. I think it would be well to parcel out the fertile lands on these islands among the different families in [plots] large enough for their subsistence. Each island could be placed under the charge of a superintendent, or governor, who would see that the soil was properly cultivated, and look after their well-being generally. Under some such a system of paternal government, with their rights of property secure, and respected, I believe that these poor people would soon cease to be a burden upon the General Government, and the products of their labor add more than over to the material wealth of the country. In any event the great gain to humanity would far outweigh the loss in cotton. . . .

Should this war continue as according to present prospects it will, the propriety of placing arms in the hands of the most active and intelligent, and giving to them some military organization, is well worth the careful consideration of those whose duty it is to decide such questions of policy. None can strike so hard for freedom as those whose chains are to be broken. . . .

I feel assured, that with a proper controlling influence to guide and educate them, the black race can be elevated and enlightened.⁸⁶

Three months before his appointment as military governor, virtually all of the principles

⁸⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 128; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 190-208; M. French to A. French, June 23, 1862, FFP; Stevens, *Enfranchisement and Citizenship*, 87-88; Stephen H. Tyng, Sr. to M. French, May 14, 1862, FFP.

⁸⁶ “‘Freedmen’ of South Carolina,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1862.

of Saxton's administration appear here fully formed. The blacks needed to support themselves—all abolitionists agreed with that and all critics feared they would not—but the proper means was the “parcel[ing] out” of the Sea Island plantations to individual households to become their permanent, “secure” property. Although this was expected to be profitable for the blacks and the nation alike, “humanity” took precedence over economy. Blacks were to be armed, because far from being inferior soldiers to whites, they would fight harder to win the liberation of their race. Finally, the whole project was to be overseen by “a firm, true hand . . . a system of paternal government . . . a proper controlling influence to guide and educate them.” Rufus Saxton would be that hand.

French met Saxton again on a visit to Washington on May 1. That day French stopped in to visit Salmon P. Chase—who still managed to keep his fingers in the Port Royal pot despite Edwin Stanton's jurisdiction—to complain about the Unitarians. Saxton was breakfasting with the secretary, and he and French spent the rest of the day together, visiting the War Department before seeing Chase again in the afternoon. There is little doubt that in those hours French worked his magic with authority figures very effectively. Saxton and French immediately found themselves to be kindred spirits. French eagerly adopted Saxton's agenda to confiscate and divide the Sea Islands plantations into permanent homesteads for the former slaves; the scion of the Frenches of Stratford and Manchester instinctively believed that land ownership was essential to prosperity and had been trying to continue on that path to financial security even during lean years as a Methodist in Ohio and New York, as will be seen in the following

chapter.⁸⁷ It also took little to excite French about arming blacks, which was the result of a complicated journey for the pacifist of ten years prior that will also be examined below. The one element that French supplied to Saxton's agenda was a priority on legally solemnizing blacks' marriages, which will be explored in the next section.⁸⁸

Saxton did not arrive in South Carolina to set up his headquarters in Beaufort until late June. In the meantime in late May he was assigned to prepare the Federal garrison at Harpers Ferry, Virginia for an assault from Stonewall Jackson after the Confederate victory at the Battle of Winchester. (Although the attack never came, Saxton was inexplicably awarded the Medal of Honor for "[d]istinguished gallantry and good conduct in the defense" thirty-one years later.) Before that crisis, however, Saxton took the first step to organize his administration on the Sea Islands by nominating French to be commissioned as a chaplain in the army and to take a place on his staff as the supervisor of the educational, religious, and humanitarian work among the contrabands. Saxton believed that this would clothe French with substantial authority and "give [him] a large field of spiritual instruction, establishing schools, aiding in getting clothing & in many other ways." French was not going home like Edward Pierce. Flattered, French was open to the position and asked Chase to recommend it to Stanton if Chase believed it to be "of the Lord." French was formally commissioned on July 10.⁸⁹ In order for the assignment

⁸⁷ See pp. 530-33.

⁸⁸ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:333-34. For French's landholdings see pp. 530-33 below; for his departure from pacifism see pp. 289-96.

⁸⁹ "Civil War Medal of Honor Recipients – (M-Z)," U.S. Army Center of Military History, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/moh/civwarmz.html> (accessed November 7, 2014); Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, May 5, 1862, SPC; Commission, July 10, 1862, FFP; C. H. Bridges to M. J. French, May 14, 1931, FFP; July 7, 1862, FFP; Memorandum, Aug. 26, 1862, FFP.

to pass muster with the War Department, Saxton nominally detailed French to duty at the army hospital in Beaufort, a post French would visit rarely in the coming years except during a period after significant fighting around Charleston Harbor in 1863.⁹⁰ Saxton also had Edward Hooper, a young Bostonian who served as Pierce's right-hand man and chosen successor, commissioned a captain and appointed him aide-de-camp and supervisor of plantation operations.⁹¹

French returned to South Carolina jubilant. He assured teacher Laura Towne that "good times are coming for us . . . that General Saxton will be our friend, and that we shall have the military in our favor instead of against us as before."⁹² Although French's optimism about the military overshot the mark, he was quite correct that Saxton was the missionaries' friend and the contrabands' too. Saxton was also peculiarly French's friend since the latter got the inside track with the general before anyone else at Port Royal could. Ironically, French was now bonded with the most powerful Unitarian on the islands, who was uniquely unfazed by French's Methodist substance and style. For the next two and half years, the two men were inseparable; they stood and fell together.

Marriage and the Contrabands

A major thrust of French's work in the South was regulating the marital

⁹⁰ Reuben Tomlinson to J. Miller McKim, August 18, 1862, May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection, #4601, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, NY; "Spiritual Provision for the Army," *The Observer*, September 17, 1863. Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, October 5, 1864; F-427; 1864; M619, roll 0257; Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1780's-1917, Record Group 94; National Archives Building; Washington, DC. Charles C. Leigh to M. French, September 29, 1863, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 26, 1864, FFP.

⁹¹ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:146, n. 12, 161; Gannett, "Steamer Atlantic" journal, March 6, 1862, William Channing Gannett Papers.

⁹² Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 55.

relationships of blacks and marrying as many couples as possible. The reasons for French's persistent focus on marriage stem from blacks' martial and sexual mores, whites' perceptions of them, French's biblical morality, and his belief that black marriages might leverage the providence of God in blacks' favor.

In Edward L. Pierce's report to Salmon P. Chase about his initial investigation of the Sea Islands, he wrote,

Notwithstanding [the blacks'] religious professions, in some cases more emotional than practical, the marriage relation, or what answers for it, is not, in many instances, held very sacred by them. The men, it is said, sometimes leave one wife and take another,—something likely to happen in any society where it is permitted or not forbidden by a stern public opinion, and far more likely to happen under laws which do not recognize marriage, and dissolve what answers for it by forced separations, dictated by the mere pecuniary interest of others.

Pierce went on to describe black women's liability to succumb to the advances of any "paramour of superior condition and race," which made them feel both flattered and ashamed. Pierce maintained that women were conditioned to acquiesce because their masters had despotic power over them and because their fathers and husbands were powerless to protect them.⁹³

Pierce believed that the cause of blacks' sexual promiscuity, therefore, was slavery itself, and that if the structures and strictures of slavery were replaced by those of free society then blacks would behave with fidelity and chastity as a matter of course. Doubters, on the other hand, believed that blacks were no more capable of controlling their sexual appetites and remaining faithful within marriage than animals were. Years after emancipation, former United States senator from Georgia and prominent

⁹³ Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*, 13-14.

Confederate Robert Toombs still scoffed, “Now what does the Negro know about the obligations of the marriage relation? No more, sir, than the parish bull or the village heifer.” Despite the vast difference in their estimations of blacks’ potential, Pierce and Toombs agreed that blacks emerging into the limbo between slavery and freedom were licentious out of ignorance of proper sexual and marital behavior, whether by nurture or by nature. Investigators that followed Pierce to the islands concluded the same thing.⁹⁴

White observers were mistaken, however, at least in part, as Herbert Gutman’s pioneering work demonstrated. In fact, most slaves married, and most married slaves lived together for a long time. Life on plantations “revolved around family units, [and] the two-parent household predominated.”⁹⁵

However, black slaves did differ from what Pierce and Toombs considered the standard when slaves behaved according to the pattern of contemporary laboring classes in Europe, which suggests that class, not race, was the principal discriminating factor. As among other working classes at the time and other premodern peoples, premarital sex was common among slaves beginning in their mid-teens. Some slaves even cohabited in trial marriages for a year or two before marrying. Marriage was not considered a prerequisite to sexual activity, but slaves did consider it a prerequisite to parenthood. When a woman conceived for the first time, she and the father usually married each other in short order. These marriages lasted; the standard of fidelity and monogamy in the slave community

⁹⁴ Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 5, 1871, quoted in Alan Conway, *The Reconstruction of Georgia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 65-66; *War of the Rebellion*, III, 3:433-34.

⁹⁵ Gutman, *Black Family*, 51; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 238.

was as strong as among free whites.⁹⁶

Of course, as in any society, some slaves diverged from the norm in both directions. On the one side, some women remained promiscuous after childbirth, and some men impregnated women and did not marry them, which put the mother under great pressure to find a husband before delivery. On the other side, some slaves of both sexes refused to have intercourse before marriage. The minority that held to premarital chastity was motivated by their Christian faith. The church had a strong hand in promoting and enforcing both the marital standard and a stricter sexual standard for the unmarried; members who committed adultery or fornication were tried and suspended or expelled. The vast majority of black females joined the church in their mid- to late teens, and for them the elaborate initiation process was a rite of passage from a libertine past to a new, pure lifestyle.⁹⁷

Of course, in all the foregoing, the word “marriage” might be put in quotation marks, because in the eyes of Pierce and Toombs, and more importantly in the eyes of the law in Southern states, slave marriages did not exist. If they did, they would have formed an uncomfortable, if not insurmountable, obstacle to the absolute sovereignty a master had to dispose of his property at will by selling one spouse away from the other. That is not to say that masters disapproved of long-lasting, monogamous slave relationships. To the contrary, slaves who were bonded with a spouse and children were easier to manage because they were more vulnerable: a master could threaten to sell them or one of their

⁹⁶ Gutman, *Black Family*, 61-70.

⁹⁷ Gutman, *Black Family*, 65-66, 70-72; Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 243-44.

family members away. This was a much more powerful disciplinary device than the lash, causing much longer-lasting suffering. Conversely, a master could also offer a form of incentive pay for extra work that would be attractive to men with children. True, some masters had Christian scruples that led them to encourage and safeguard two-parent slave families and even to celebrate weddings that had no legal force, but these quasi-marriages were no protection if the master's financial interests demanded that he liquidate his human assets. When a husband was sold far away from his wife, the marriage was effectively voided, and the man was likely to form a new marriage with an unattached woman on his new plantation, which in turn reinforced whites' beliefs about blacks' promiscuity.⁹⁸

Masters also had a vested interest in slaves' sexual norms that they derided. Regardless of what slaveowners planted and how much land they owned, their slaves were the greatest repository of their wealth. Moreover, after the United States closed down its international slave trade in 1808, slave reproduction was critical to the survival of the labor arrangement, not to mention its extension westward. Therefore, owners kept women with a proven record of producing healthy offspring and would not sell them away from their families. Owners also took care not to work pregnant women hard in order to protect the unborn children. Sometimes a master forced an unattached woman to breed with a slave she hated. These practices provided large incentives for women to get pregnant as early and as often as possible to men they chose.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Gutman, *Black Family*, 79-80; Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 239-40.

⁹⁹ Gutman, *Black Family*, 74-79, 84-85.

These conditions almost devastated the capacity of male slaves to be the husbands and fathers they wanted to be. Although some tried valiantly to support their households by hunting, fishing, or earning money doing extra work where possible, in the end the master was the true provider. The slave constantly saw himself demeaned, degraded, and even savagely punished in front of his family. Worse, his wife and children were subject to the same abuse, and his life was at risk if he intervened to defend them. Worst of all was when a lecherous master raped his wife or daughter or bribed the same with special advantages in exchange for sex. Faced with these realities, some black men preferred to marry women on neighboring plantations so that they would not have to see these outrages when they occurred. Some told Mansfield French that “they rarely cultivate affection for their companions, or children, as it only made the pangs of separation, which was liable to occur any day, the more insufferable.” Still others, both “free” of responsibilities and unable to bear them, actually did lead the irresponsible, libertine lives that whites accused them of.¹⁰⁰

Although antislavery Northerners hardly grasped the complexity of blacks’ marital and sexual lives, they knew for decades that planters’ greed and lust reinforced or even drove what they did know of the system, and they were incensed over it. Therefore, with a great deal of righteous indignation and zeal the architects of the Port Royal Experiment built family formation according to their standards into their project from the beginning. French told the Cooper Union meeting on February 20 that “[m]any husbands

¹⁰⁰ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 238-39; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2011), NOOK e-book, 104; Gutman, *Black Family*, 80-84; Curtis D. Johnson, *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civil War*, American Ways Series (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), 106; M. French to Robert K. Scott, November 6, 1866, FFP; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 116-18.

and wives were united” already, which raises the possibility that French himself solemnized the marriages of informally wedded couples on his investigatory tour at the same time that Pierce was recommending “a system which shall recognize and enforce the marriage relation among them” to Chase.¹⁰¹

Modern scholars typically use the term “Victorian” to refer to the complex of beliefs “that marriage and hence the ‘family’ required positive legal and contractual sanction to be ‘real,’ that ‘sex’ had to be subordinated absolutely to marriage, and that sexual ‘restraint’ (the ‘ideal of chastity’) had to be imposed upon all inferior and dependent classes and races.” The label “Victorian,” though handy, is somewhat odd, as it implies that these sexual-marital mores were invented by a British monarch. In reality, this ethical complex was rooted in Christianity, was lived out among certain groups of English Protestants at least as early as the seventeenth-century (not coincidentally concentrated in New England), and rose to an unusual (and temporary) level of dominance in the Anglophone middle and upper classes far beyond its religious bounds in the nineteenth century.¹⁰² Gideon’s Band and its supporters believed it critical to instill these ways into the blacks because the Gideonites were Christians of one sort or another; even the non-Yankee, black ministers and deacons on the islands had been trying to establish the same regime. Gideonites also hastened to institute these standards because they formed a necessary part of the project of lifting the contrabands into the middle

¹⁰¹ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 80; Pierce, *Negroes at Port Royal*, 13-14; “Aid for Contrabands at Port Royal,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1862.

¹⁰² Gutman, *Black Family*, 62; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), NOOK e-book, 104-8. Fischer notes that the Puritans did not idealize chastity per se as other Christian traditions did and Victorians would—far from it—but they were severely rigorous about chastity before marriage.

class.¹⁰³

Yet Mansfield French had another reason to be zealous to form legal marriages that was uniquely his own. French “doubted that the Government, however much it might desire reconstruction [i.e., reunion], could ever sever these unions. God would stand in the way of that.” Observe the logic. If the Federal government ended the war prematurely, then the contrabands would fall back into the hands of their former owners and become subject to South Carolina’s law. As a result their new, legal marriages would be annulled. Placing his trust in Jesus’ dictum that “what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9), French was certain that God would not allow this to happen. Therefore, the more slaves’ relationships were legitimized, the fewer blacks God would let fall back into slavery, and the more firmly he would bind the Union to persist in making war until all the slaves were freed, which was God’s objective for the war even if the Federal government had not yielded to it yet. Solemnizing contrabands’ marriages on a massive scale as a matter of policy would thus align the Northern war effort with God’s sure-to-succeed agenda, and it would also ensure that God would supernaturally prevent the government from abandoning that agenda. In other words, marrying slaves was a step toward marrying the government with God, a union that, once made, no men could put asunder, whether Southern armies or Northern voters. The North and its war would thereby be committed to Universal Freedom. Sound or not, this reasoning propelled French’s exertions to see blacks united in matrimony for years to come. “Every barrier that can be prudently raised against the reenslavement of this people, we shall most

¹⁰³ See pp. 251-54.

certainly raise,” French vowed, referring to the solemnizations he was performing. “God is in the work of deliverance. To try to undo it, is to rush into folly, injustice & into worse national troubles, than we have yet seen.”¹⁰⁴

Whether French’s divine-intervention theory held good or not, legal marriage did mean freedom. Nancy Cott observes that an essential aspect of freedom coming into vogue in the mid-nineteenth century was “freedom to consent and make contracts . . . to be employed and to marry legally. The labor contract and the marriage contract—choice of work and choice of spouse—were parallel in many minds, both privileges and attributes of the free American.” In black and white eyes alike, black men’s dignity was elevated if they were given the mutually reinforcing freedoms to marry at will and to work at will and if they exhibited the virtues necessary to succeed in both. In short, if a black man deserved to marry, then he deserved to choose his employer . . . and maybe, eventually, even deserved to vote. A black man and a black woman who were married and lived accordingly could not be animals as Robert Toombs insisted. Legal marriage meant legal acknowledgment of black adults’ humanity and maturity, a crucial step toward recognition of their equal capacity and worth with whites.¹⁰⁵

Black couples knew this, so they flocked to Mansfield French and other ministers to be married wherever the preachers went. Two weeks after Gideon’s Band landed at Port Royal, French preached in a crude church building on a plantation:

At the close, a couple, both formerly slaves of this same master, came forward

¹⁰⁴ “Aid for Contrabands at Port Royal,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1862; Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 18, 1862, AMA 115127.

¹⁰⁵ Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 81-82.

before the Congregation for marriage. This to me was a privilege & duty unlooked for. I improved the opportunity to instruct the people as to the duties, relations & sacredness of the marriage relation, & then, in the most solemn manner joined them as husband & wife, in the name of the God of Abram, Isaac & Jacob. If God ever owned a marriage, making it sacred, by the manifestation of his presence, I believe he owned this marriage. I prayed that God would never let the Government, by the sword of slavery, put asunder these two so sacredly joined in one. Others, self-married, craved the privilege of having their unions solemnly ratified. We intend to do much of this work.¹⁰⁶

And indeed they did, French taking the lead. French requested thousands of high-quality certificates of marriage from the American Missionary Association to give to the legalized couples as well as to the hundreds of new couples. Although most black couples were eager to renew their vows legally, some were reluctant. A black Presbyterian minister nearly seventy years of age dragged his wife to French to legalize their marriage. The wife resisted, believing that they had “marriage enough,” but she gave in after a teacher “urged it for the sake of setting a good example for the young people.” Other missionaries were not as supportive of French’s marriage initiative as this teacher. Although the Gideonites’ concern to establish and propagate legal marriage among the blacks dated from before the experiment made landfall and was shared by evangelicals and Unitarians alike, French’s ardent leadership of this part of the mission brought it into disrepute among those who disliked him more with each passing month. Some Unitarians came to consider marriage solemnization a waste of time, a distraction from their true objective of establishing orderly wage-labor on the plantations and teaching blacks to read and write. One superintendent sarcastically wrote to another, “We were encouraged (!) by a shipment of Bible Readers” that came from the evangelical AMA and NFRA at

¹⁰⁶ Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 18, 1862, AMA 115127.

French's request. "I should think a fool must have in charge one branch of our mission. I hear of a large lot of marriage certificates for all those who have heretofore been informally joined. If that idea is carried out I think we had better take *French leave* of these Islands."¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile, as the summer of 1862 proceeded, more contrabands in need of organization, clothing, and education as well as legal marriage came under Gen. Saxton's purview. As soon as Saxton arrived at Beaufort at the end of June he dispatched Mansfield French to travel down the coast to St. Simons Island, Georgia and Fernandina, Florida, presently occupied by Union forces, to learn of the condition of the contrabands in those places. On a Sabbath morning at St. Simons, French had the privilege of preaching on Ezra 9:8-9 ("For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage"):

In the evening, we had the pleasure of uniting in marriage a very interesting couple in Mr. King's mansion. I do not think it was ever graced with a marriage more pleasing in the sight of the Lord. The parties were very tastefully attired, as also were their attendants. The company was "select." The navy was duly represented. At the close, a marriage fee was passed into our hands—the most precious one we ever received, and, considering the source, we thought the largest. It was one dollar.¹⁰⁸

After French returned from his "most dangerous journey," Saxton, French, and a group of missionaries and teachers went back to these locations and to St. Augustine,

¹⁰⁷ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 81, 192; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:333-34; Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, June 28, 1862, AMA H5147; Mansfield French to unknown, July 27, 1862, AMA H5151; Mansfield French to Simeon S. Jocelyn, October 19, 1862, AMA H5156; Mansfield French to Simeon S. Jocelyn and George Whipple, January 14, 1863, AMA H5174; Mansfield French to George Whipple, July 30, 1863, AMA H5230; "From E. S. Williams," *American Missionary* 7, no. 4 (April 1863): 88; "From E. S. Williams," *American Missionary* 7, no. 6 (June 1863): 139; F. E. Barnard to William Channing Gannett, May 27, 1862, William Channing Gannett Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, June 28, 1862, AMA H5147; *New York Tribune*, August 9, 1862 (FFP 3F18-002).

Florida—Saxton to inspect conditions for himself and the civilians to extend the reach of plantation management, humanitarian relief, and education to the hundreds of destitute blacks on St. Simons. The expedition gave considerable irritation to the Gideonites who went along. While French accompanied Saxton to Florida to start a school in Fernandina, the rest were forced to perform picket duty on St. Simons Island, which had no military garrison. The very day that Saxton arrived back at the island a detachment of twenty Confederates, intent on abducting or killing the island's blacks, were repulsed in a bloody skirmish with a similar number of contrabands, who had been armed and trained for self-defense by the navy captain in command in the region. This kind of service was not what the missionaries had signed up for. In their eyes and in the eyes of many back at Port Royal, "Mr French's enthusiasm & want of judgment involved them in an enterprise disagreeable and burdensome, and almost entirely unproductive of good." Again French's practicality came under fire. Saxton's presence was a new factor, however. The St. Simons expedition was the first of multiple occasions in which a plan of unknown origin emerged from the counsels of Saxton and French, something went wrong in its execution, the much-beloved Saxton was excused by the Gideonites, and the much-maligned French took the blame.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, French's efforts to legalize contrabands' marriages and especially his visits to St. Simons Island revealed unforeseen complications to him. Because slavemasters considered separation by sale to dissolve slaves' marriages—a principle

¹⁰⁹ Mansfield French to unknown, July 27, 1862, AMA H5151; "The Freedmen of the South," *New York Times*, September 15, 1862; Reuben Tomlinson to J. Miller McKim, August 18, 1862, May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection.

often held by local churches as well—French encountered “very many with two and three companions in the same colony, and those whom they once loved tenderly, whom God blessed with children. . . . Some rule must be laid down, and enforced with kindness and discretion.” Still believing strongly that all current and new marriages must be legalized and certified “by a minister or magistrate,” French maintained that “[t]he people almost universally express regret that proper forms of marriage have, in any instance, been denied them, and not only are all such ready to ratify their marriage vows, but . . . many desire to have it done in the most public and solemn manner.” French approved, believing that the greater the formality, the greater the impression made of the sacredness of marriage on the minds of the freedpeople, and the more likely to keep them from “dissolution” in the long run.¹¹⁰

Saxton responded to French’s convictions by issuing regulations that compelled the contrabands under his authority to conform to the “Victorian” sexual and marital code. In General Orders No. 7 issued on August 22 (and probably drafted by French), Saxton commanded all blacks wishing to be married to apply to French or another minister. French was authorized to keep a register of marriages and would provide a marriage certificate to each couple. Any black man who had more than one partner was required to confine himself to the one to whom he was legally married, and if he was not legally married to any of two or more partners then he was required to marry legally the one with whom he had children. In addition, from that date any cohabiting blacks not legally married as well as any blacks committing adultery would “be liable to arrest and

¹¹⁰ *New York Tribune*, August 9, 1862 (FFP 3F18-002).

imprisonment.” The superintendents on each plantation were required to read these stipulations to the contrabands under their supervision and explain that they were “designed to secure and regulate the performance of duties which are enjoined by the plainest dictates of a mere wor[l]dly experience as well as by the sublimer teachings of a living Christianity.” In separate orders issued on November 14, Saxton announced a commission composed of French and two others as the arbiters of “domestic difficulty” in the department with the authority to grant divorces in cases of “bad treatment, desertion, or unfaithfulness.”¹¹¹

In addition to the foregoing, there was one other noteworthy episode from French’s time among the contrabands on St. Simons Island. French invited parents to bring their children to be baptized, and when the time came he was surprised by how many approached, including many children with only grandparents, many with no parents, and many the children of masters:

As we passed through the solemn service of baptizing these children in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, from our inmost soul went up the prayer that not only might every one be a true soldier of the Cross, but also that every one might belong to the army of Freedom. Fifty-two children were dedicated to the service of God and Freedom on that occasion.¹¹²

By this time French’s conception of “the army of Freedom” and its relationship to “the service of God” had undergone an immense change that vastly impacted his ministry priorities. Propelled by them, he was about to play a small but pivotal role in bringing

¹¹¹ Enclosed in “Saxton, Rufus, Capt. & Bvt. Col. U.S.A., In reply to certain specifications against his administration of Freedmen’s affairs in So. Ca. & Ga. made by Genls. Steedman & Fullerton”; S-899; 1866; M619, roll 0515. An example of French’s promotion and application of these rules is in “From E. S. Williams,” *American Missionary* 7, no. 4 (April 1863): 88. Along with their marriage certificate, each legalized couple also received a Bible as a gift.

¹¹² *New York Tribune*, August 9, 1862 (FFP 3F18-002).

about an essential for Union victory: the transformation of slaves into soldiers.

French and the Old Testament: Total Warfare for Slaves' Freedom

With the coming of civil war, the Old Testament and its jeremiads, imprecatory psalms, and portrayal of a just, avenging God suddenly came back into vogue among Yankee evangelicals steeped in the New Testament. Retracing the track of their Puritan forbears, these evangelicals assumed that the United States as a whole was, in a manner of speaking, "Israel," a covenant people chosen by God. In God's mysterious providence, he destined each section of the nation to chastise the other for the whole nation's sins.¹¹³

Long before the war, however, and out of Yankees' sight, black slaves had developed their own self-concept as God's Israel. This conception was linked to the African thought-world from which the slaves, their parents, or their grandparents had come. The blacks' cosmos not only closely incorporated a spirit-populated plane and the visible world into a single, complex reality, as was evident in black Christians' sense of the immediate presence of God and the nearness of the threshold of heaven. Their universe also brought the ancestral past into close touch with the present. Here the multiethnic, multilingual slaves in the New World, devoid of a common ancestry, had a problem. Historian Mechal Sobel theorized that "Bible history—the history of Israel, of the Hebrew slaves and their redemption—became the black Baptist's sacred past. They themselves felt as if they were of the seed of Abraham, and biblical 'space' became their sacred topography." Or as Lawrence Levine put it, slaves "extended the boundaries of

¹¹³ James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 45-46.

their restrictive universe backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond.” Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who arrived on the Sea Islands in the fall of 1862, claimed, “Their memories are a vast bewildered chaos of Jewish history and biography; and most of the great events of the past, down to the period of the American Revolution, they instinctively attribute to Moses.” In short, biblical Israel’s history became the slaves’ history—they were one people.¹¹⁴

Higginson found that blacks’ music—the spirituals—was so thick with allusions to Old Testament narratives that in his judgment the New Testament seemed to be nearly unknown to them. In Levine’s words again, “It is important that Daniel and David and Joshua and Jonah and Moses and Noah,” the slaves’ adopted ancestors who “fill the lines of the spirituals, were delivered in *this* world and delivered in ways which struck the imagination of the slaves.” As one spiritual ran,

He delivered Daniel from de lion’s den,
Jonah from de belly ob de whale,
And de Hebrew children from de fiery furnace,
And why not every man?

Blacks did not dichotomize deliverance *in* this world and deliverance *from* this world; both were the acts of the saving God of Israel. The same song typically had application to both realms.¹¹⁵

This principle was evident in other features of black religion. To the Unitarian

¹¹⁴ Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies 36 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 125; Levine, *Black Culture*, 32-33, 50.

¹¹⁵ Levine, *Black Culture*, 23, 50-51; Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 66-67.

Higginson, the blacks' disinterest in the ethical teachings of Jesus was proof that they cared little for him. This was hardly the case. Like white evangelicals, blacks considered Jesus to be the individual's Savior from sin, death, the devil, and hell. But enslaved blacks saw Christ as the Savior from physical as well as spiritual bondage. Their Jesus was not just the expiating sacrifice on the cross but also the Book of Revelation's Warrior-King descending on a white horse to tread down the oppressor and liberate the oppressed. The same principle was expressed in blacks' distinctive worship practice, the ring shout. The shout was not only the means for mourning sinners to "come through" to assurance of cleansing and forgiveness. It also served as an acted-out rehearsal of the procession of Israelite slaves out of Egyptian bondage or the circuit Israel's warriors made around Jericho before its walls fell down, mythic-historical victories that slaves fervently expected to be recapitulated in their place and day.¹¹⁶

The harmony between the Sea Island blacks' worldview and Mansfield French's worldview is obvious. Independently of one another, each saw the Old Testament, especially with its stories of war and deliverance, as the repository of their own past-in-the-present. It formed the matrix by which each understood the world around them. Although French was not strictly unique among white evangelicals in this, he was extreme.

Even more importantly, French began applying the concept of Israel-the-people-of-God to enslaved blacks in America long before he met them. Since he compared Hungarians under imperial dominance in 1852 to Israelites in Egyptian slavery, it was

¹¹⁶ Levine, *Black Culture*, 38, 43, 50.

automatic to make the same comparison to actually enslaved blacks in the United States. In 1856 French prayed in the pages of the *Beauty of Holiness*, “May the mighty Deliverer of Israel from her Egyptian bondage, stretch out his arm in [blacks’] behalf.” Before French ever conversed with blacks in the South, he already saw them the way they saw themselves.¹¹⁷

When French did begin meeting contrabands at Fortress Monroe and at Port Royal, his wonder at their vibrant faith amid the worst circumstances only increased his certainty that he had encountered God’s chosen people. Since he recognized how many of them had been “taught some of the deep things of God in the school of Christ” he concluded that “[t]he great majority are pious”—that is, converted. This conclusion signalled a profound shift in how French conducted his ministry. Until that point French was an evangelist whose object was to see sinners justified and saints sanctified, and his career as a publisher was simply the literary extension of that calling. The eradication of slavery was important in its own right but it was also a concomitant of Christians’ perfection in love. Yet in the voluminous documentary remains from the moment French visited Fortress Monroe until his departure from the South for the last time in 1868, *not once* does French mention blacks being saved or perfected, nor is there any indication that he preached with those ends in mind. It seems that French swiftly turned his belief that “the great majority” were saved into the practical presupposition that all the blacks he met were both saved and sanctified. In this respect French was like nearly all his white contemporaries, who, regardless of the substance of their opinions about blacks’ moral

¹¹⁷ See pp. 172, 178; “Editorial Miscellanies,” *BH* 7, no. 7 (June 1856): 176.

character and behavior, almost invariably overgeneralized them to every member of the race. Certainly French preached much in the way of spiritual encouragement and ethical instruction to his black hearers, but he functioned as though he assumed that all of them were regenerate and that any sins they committed happened not because they consciously gave in to temptation but because of their ignorance—a kind of misdeed that, as John Wesley had taught, fell within the bounds of the perfected life.¹¹⁸

Like the blacks he ministered to, French loved to make typological analogies from biblical narratives to this latter-day chosen people. Three recurred the most in his writing and speaking. The first, naturally, was Israel's exodus from Egypt. In the Frenches' minds' that analogy even involved the Port Royal missionaries. Austa triumphantly announced that with their expedition

having originated, as to earthly agency, in the brain of our own Moses [i.e., Mansfield French], he having led this band of Ladies to this Red Sea, it was all important that it be crossed rightly and successfully, carrying the sacred ark unharmed. And it was, praise God. Our Miriams are already shouting victory on the hither side, while the pro-slavery host, their wheels already dragging heavily, are thundering on to the engulfing, that they proudly and madly demand and defy [cf. Exodus 14-15].¹¹⁹

The second analogy had to do with Israel's conquest and possession of Canaan, both Moses' instructions to that effect and Joshua's execution of the orders. Canaan was not only a symbol for freedom; it also became a label for physical earth that Rufus Saxton—and then Mansfield French and others including the blacks themselves—believed was

¹¹⁸ "Glance at Fortress Monroe," *BH* 13, no. 2 (February 1862): 69-70; French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 29; Mansfield French to George Whipple and Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 18, 1862, AMA 115127; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 146; see pp. 94-95 above.

¹¹⁹ Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 35; "Freedomward!" *BH* 13, no. 5 (May 1862): 165; French, *Slavery in South Carolina*, 45. Rose (*Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 55) called Austa's application of the Exodus to the Port Royal Experiment an "outrageous metaphor," but within the Frenches' typological thought-world it made perfect sense.

the blacks' to possess. French was confident that "the *rebellion* shall be *utterly annihilated*, and God, in his providence, shall say, as He *most certainly will*, to *all our brave soldiers*, to *all honest patriots*, and *especially* to *all the freedmen* of the South, 'Behold the *Lord thy God* hath set the *land* before thee; *go up and possess it* [Deuteronomy 1:21].'¹²⁰

The third typological analogy was the story of Esther. This Jewish queen of the Medo-Persian Empire risked her life to appeal to her husband, the supreme governmental authority, to legislate on behalf of God's and her people, who lay under imminent threat of annihilation at the hands of their enemies. Part of the peculiar attraction of this analogy is that it enabled Mansfield French to make sense of his own role in God's plan of deliverance. "We must bear the burdens & sufferings of our oppressed brethren before the Government, as did Queen Esther, those of her people, before Ahasuerus," French proclaimed to George Whipple of the AMA, "& if we *perish, then, let us perish* [Esther 4:16]."¹²¹ Blacks would employ these same three analogies to interpret their civil and political situation all the way through Reconstruction.¹²²

In sum, the minds of Mansfield French and the blacks emerging from slavery were aligned. Both used the Old Testament past to understand the present, and both viewed American blacks as continuous with the people of Israel in the salvific dealings of God. Even though one party spoke with a Yankee accent and the other with a Gullah

¹²⁰ Mansfield French to the American Missionary Association, June 23, 1862, AMA H5145; M. French to A. French, July 9, 1864, FFP; M. French to William P. Fessenden, September 1, 1864, facsimile, FFP.

¹²¹ Mansfield French to George Whipple, August 28, 1862, AMA 15901; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 15, 1864, SPC.

¹²² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 110-11.

accent, they all were speaking the same language, a tongue that others on the islands struggled to understand. This being the case, the supremacy of French's influence among the contrabands over that of other whites was inevitable.

This is not to say that French and the contrabands shared no similarities with other white Christians. In addition to the beliefs about conversion that evangelicals of both races held in common, French, the blacks, other Northern evangelicals, the Unitarians generally, and for that matter even white Southerners had a remarkably similar cast of mind as to the providence of God (i.e., God's sovereign, deliberate shaping of events to accomplish his purposes). As George C. Rable deftly describes, at the time of the Civil War, Calvinist and Arminian, Protestant and Catholic, white and black believed that "[e]verything—storms, harvests, illnesses, deaths—unfolded according to God's will." It was automatic for them to view the fortunes of war the same way. For these Americans, belief in an all-overruling divine sovereignty and commitment to a voluntary, participatory republic "went hand in hand." Americans on both sides of the conflict believed their nations to be called out for a special purpose by the providence of God, and they applied Scriptures embedded in the relationship between God and Israel to explain what their nations experienced and to justify their often ruthless actions. At the same time, the awful cost of the war drove ordinary Americans to wonder what it all was for. People of faith naturally looked to their faith for answers. Even as the track of the war zig-zagged unpredictably and dragged people's emotions with it, people of faith persisted in seeing it all as part of a larger, God-ordained plan. The theology underlying their convictions was belief in a God who was personally invested in the destinies of people

and nations.¹²³

Accordingly, Americans of faith viewed disasters, individual and national, as divine chastenings for sin; evangelicals especially had long been in the habit of assuming that God would bless the nation if its government was moral and would severely punish the nation if the government was not. Tied to this assumption was believers' remarkable confidence that they were able to interpret God's providential intentions and benevolent admonitions through current events. This was yet another outflow of Scottish Common Sense Realism—a notion that not only the Bible and the natural world but even the affairs of human beings constituted God's clear, simple, rational, fully comprehensible communication to humankind. Naturally Americans applied this confidence to incidents in the war as well. French produced a typical example in the *Beauty of Holiness* in May 1862:

At the recent battle at Pittsburg Landing [Shiloh] . . . the left wing of the rebel army was led by Major-Gen. [Leonidas] Polk. How mournful the spectacle of a Christian [Episcopal] bishop leading the hordes of this monstrous rebellion to attack the best government on earth, on the holy Sabbath-day. But how clear and unmistakable the rebuke of Providence in defeating the attacking party in every Sunday battle in this war—as also, we believe, in every battle during the Revolution.¹²⁴

In consequence, each people engaged in the Civil War had a similar-in-shape but different-in-substance providentialist explanation of God's purpose in bringing the war about. For Southerners God's purpose was to bring the pious Confederate Israel out from

¹²³ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 1-9.

¹²⁴ Charles Chester Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860*, Columbia Studies in the Social Sciences 580 (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), 146-53; Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), NOOK e-book, 85-105; "Reproach and Vindication," *BH* 13, no. 5 (May 1862): 166-67.

godless Northern tyranny. For Northerners of an antislavery bent, God intended the war to punish his Israel—composed of both sections—for its collective sin of slavery and to beget a new, pure nation on the other side of its bloody baptism. Yet “[f]or northern and southern black evangelicals,” Daniel W. Stowell describes,

the central fact of the war was the deliverance of four million black men, women, and children from the bonds of slavery. The central actor in this drama was God. The results of the war demonstrated His care for His children in bondage and His condemnation of slavery and its beneficiaries. The northern people and northern armies were simply instruments in God’s hands to carry out His judgment . . . on the South for the sins of slavery and secession.¹²⁵

Carefully distinguishing the different answers to the question, “Who is Israel?” is critical to understanding Mansfield French. Like other Northerners French certainly affirmed that God was punishing the people of the entire United States for its corporate sin, and at times in 1861 he rang the changes of America as God’s people.¹²⁶ Yet for the most part and definitely by 1862—unlike his fellow antislavery Northern whites, including many abolitionists—French did not believe that the United States constituted the people of God any more than he did when he wrote to Lajos Kossuth ten years earlier.¹²⁷ Rather, French agreed with black Christians that *they* were God’s chosen people. And if the blacks were the Israelites, then the rebels were the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and the Persians sharpening their swords under Haman’s edict rolled into one.

What then was the North? Far from being the central figures in a struggle for the

¹²⁵ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 65-69.

¹²⁶ “God at the Nation’s Helm,” *BH* 12, no. 7 (July 1861): 222-23.

¹²⁷ “Many Shall Be White and Tried,” *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 186-87; see pp. 178-80 above.

Union, Northerners were auxiliaries to the real conflict between wicked slavemasters on one side and the slaves and their God on the other. Nevertheless, Northerners' supporting role was an important one, because God had orchestrated circumstances to force the ever-ambivalent North to decide once and for all between the two combatants in this holy war. Quite simply, if the North made its mission the assistance of God's people in their struggle, then it would partake of the blacks' blessings of victory, peace, and safety. If it did not, then it would share in the wrathful judgment due God's Confederate enemies. This assumption was the basis of all of French's explanations and exhortations about the triumphs and defeats of Union forces. When French was visiting Washington in September 1862 he found out about General George B. McClellan's operation to destroy or capture the fragmented Confederate Army of Northern Virginia that had invaded Maryland. Yet French did not expect the Army of the Potomac to succeed to the extent that Lincoln hoped, because "the government is *tame*. More scourging is needful to open the nation's eye, soften its heart & persuade it to 'let the people go.' " French was sure "that our army may have God with it, if it will be *pure* & fight only for the *right*"—that is, the abolition of slavery and the prosperity of black people.¹²⁸

French's comments here require us to trace his path from the unqualified pacifism he professed in 1852 to unqualified support of military means to secure Universal Freedom ten years later. If warfare was sinful and doomed when it was waged for Hungarians, why was it acceptable when waged for black Americans? If French expected

¹²⁸ "The Burden of the Lord," *BH* 12, no. 9 (September 1861): 287; "Freedomward!" *BH* 13, no. 5 (May 1862): 165; M. French to George Lansing and E. Taylor, September 11, 1862, FFP; M. French to George Lansing and E. Taylor, April 9, 1863, FFP. Cf. Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), NOOK e-book, 118, 161, 224-25.

God to liberate captives by miraculous, spiritual means ten years earlier, why did he expect God to do so by providential, physical means now?¹²⁹ French left no record of whether he consciously repudiated his earlier pacifism, qualified it, or integrated it with his beliefs about the justice of an American war for emancipation. He may have simply ignored it. We will never know exactly how or why he traveled from one set of convictions about warfare to its opposite, but there are some clues that suggest how he rationalized his destination in articles that appeared in the *Beauty of Holiness* in 1861 and 1862, most of them by other authors.

One article (which French presented as a “most logical presentation” for “[s]ome tender conscience”) was by his old friend Edward Thomson, now editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal*. Thomson argued that secession was an intrinsically criminal act, because if a state can secede, so can the smallest unit (even “a tavern”!), and then there would be no government, only anarchy. Thomson acknowledged that the United States itself had seceded from Great Britain, but he pointed out a salient difference between the Revolutionary patriots’ position and that of the modern Confederates. Although rebellion may be justified when a government is a terror to the innocent instead of to the guilty, Thomson conceded, this was not the case in 1860-61. In fact, the South controlled much of the government when the rebellion began, so it was, in a manner of speaking, rebelling against itself.¹³⁰

Did this criminal act of secession legitimate the government’s use of violent

¹²⁹ See pp. 175-78.

¹³⁰ “War Sometimes a Duty,” *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 179.

force? Thomson argued that if it takes two policemen to pursue one violent criminal and capture him dead or alive, then bringing an army of rebels to justice is no different; it is simply the same principle applied on a larger scale. If violence is justified against a single criminal then it is every bit as justified against a host of criminals. The war, then, was simply an action to maintain domestic peace and order; the degree was much larger but the type of action was the same. As a Reverend J. Seed asserted in another article, passages in the New Testament—namely, Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2—teach that the government has a vocation from God to use force against evildoers who do not submit to it. (French claimed to have seen “nothing superior to this in all the multitude of pulpits that *now* speak.”)¹³¹

Henry Ward Beecher insisted that war on this basis could be entirely compatible with love if care was taken in its execution. Although Beecher expressed unmitigated hatred toward injustice and rebellion, he claimed to love and pray for the men leading the rebellion. War must be used and violence done to put it down, but restraint was required; a single bullet beyond what was needed would be “a flagrant treason against the law of love.” In 1861 French was acutely conscious that God “hath arisen to save the meek of the earth, the poor and needy, and him that had no helper [Psalm 72:12]” and would do so with wrath on their oppressors. Yet at the same time he evoked Jesus’ parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son to remind his readers that

love to our neighbor includes love to the slaveholder. He is fallen among thieves even far worse than himself [Luke 10:30]. Satan and his legions, earthly and infernal, wound him, deplete him, in moral sensibilities, benumb his conscience,

¹³¹ “War Sometimes a Duty,” *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 179; “Address to the Lawrence County Volunteers,” *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 181.

and strip him of dear, blood-bought righteousness, and so of heaven. Alas! he is given over to believe a lie. Now, to be saved, he must be robbed of his great sin, as is the drunkard of his cups. Then he will come to his right mind, and see all things clearly. Were this class to come North, forsaking this sin, they would find the warmest abolitionists their warmest, best, tenderest friends and lovers. The fatted calf would be killed, feasting, with no taunts—not one! would greet them [Luke 15:23-24]. Those whom they now regard as their enemies, would divide every comfort, yea their last loaf, if need be, with them. Nothing would be wanting to show them that pure love loves all, and those most who suffer most for righteousness' sake. Oh! the time is coming when love! love! pure love! shall fill the earth.¹³²

The Frenches and others felt that the North had been dragged unwillingly into war by the South's criminal violence and were only engaged in it with the utmost reluctance; they had no choice. "Every means had failed," Austa lamented with a grotesque metaphor: "It was now only to take the sword or let the bestiality of slavery overspread the fair, virgin soil, West and North." Moreover, Austa believed that the war was God's instrument not only for the liberation of slaves but also for the proliferation of holiness. She saw it producing conversions in the army but even more importantly "a revival of the moral sense of man, of the justice of religion, of the purity of religion, of the mercy of religion, of the trustworthiness of a Christian nation to its government; the grand deposit our God has committed to the will, heart, and conscience of this nation." The war was revealing what Americans were made of; God was even putting the perfected through this unprecedented test to prove their perfection. "Most who fall, upon the side of the Government," Austa asserted, "fall martyrs to country, liberty, purity, Christ! God bless them now, and until and in their precious though terrible death!"¹³³

¹³² "Christian Duty in the Crisis," *BH* 12, no. 7 (July 1861): 207; "God at the Nation's Helm," *BH* 12, no. 7 (July 1861): 222-23.

¹³³ "Our Only Plea," *BH* 12, no. 5 (May 1861): 158-59; "Nothing but the Whip Answering," *BH* 13, no. 4 (April 1862): 134-35; "Many Shall Be Made White and Tried," *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 184-87.

The reference to martyrdom in Austa's dramatic benediction (a comparison that would become quite common on both sides in ensuing years)¹³⁴ indicates a transcendent absolutism lurking in these justifications of the war. Absolutism was hardly surprising given the character and convictions of the Frenches, but it served to undermine both the theory that sufficiently forceful prosecution of this war was compatible with love and the practice of waging war in a limited manner. Henry Ward Beecher argued that it was impossible and inappropriate to calculate the proportion of suffering and loss in the war to the ends to be gained by the war. The things lost were so mean compared to "the sanctity of government maintained, and the authority of law vindicated, and the right of liberty achieved" that there was no comparison. Anything and everything should be spent in the conflict in order to win them. French's friend George B. Cheever went a step further in an 1861 sermon. Citing John Brown as an exemplar, Cheever claimed that the pure fury of abolitionists against the rebellion, "this eternal love of freedom for all, this irresistible sentiment of justice and hatred of all injustice," was the most reliable fuel for the North's war effort. If Brown was indeed a genuine model, then neither a first strike nor attacks on civilians were off limits so long as the objective was the abolition of slavery.¹³⁵

Stemming from this absolutist impulse, French made a monumental turnabout. Although French heavily leaned on the Old Testament typologically in 1852, he also categorically proclaimed the New Testament superior to the Old in ethics. In 1862 he

¹³⁴ Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 23, 118, 300-2, 405.

¹³⁵ "Our National Trials," *BH* 12, no. 9 (September 1861): 274-75; Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 114-15.

taught the reverse. A reader of the *Beauty of Holiness* asked, quoting the words of Jesus, “How can Christians and ministers advocate war? ‘Do good to your enemies.’ ‘Pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you [Luke 6:27-28].’” French replied, “As to ‘forgiving,’ ‘loving,’ ‘doing good to’ enemies, we must do all that with our personal enemies, whatever they do to us. But it is quite another thing to see one rob another of comfort, life, body and soul, when we are called upon by the divinely instituted government to prevent it, by the last, the terrible resort, war.” By itself, French’s answer suggests that he had evolved from pacifism to just war theory. But he did not stop there: “One must believe it is a righteous war, as was God’s when he commanded Joshua to ‘cut off,’ ‘put to the edge of the sword’ ‘every thing that breathed’ [Joshua 10:28-40; 11:11-14]. Not even an infant could be spared. How terrible is God in righteousness . . . !” French consoled himself that even in God’s fearsome wrath there remained mercy, for “[t]hese infants entered heaven, atoned for, purified with all who never reached [the age of] accountability.” Yet French said nothing about the adult victims of Joshua’s genocide, not to mention why or how the rules of warfare for that generation of Israel applied eighteen centuries after the first coming of Christ.¹³⁶

The collapse of any sense of proportionality merged with French’s reliance on the Old Testament to define the terms of his world; his hermeneutical journey was complete. In mid-1863, after two years of war had hardened and impelled both sides to escalating mercilessness, French reported to his daughter and son-in-law,

The Lord aided me in preaching a great war sermon from “The Sword of the Lord & Gideon” [Judges 7:20]. . . . I think it the best, for strong points & directness, I

¹³⁶ “Editorial Miscellanies,” *BH* 12, no. 6 (June 1861): 191.

ever preached. Last Sabbath I preached another in Beaufort, to the troops. Genl. Saxton was present. Text, Joshua 8:1. I tried to prove that *severe dealing with our enemies* is mercy to the masses of them, as well as to ourselves. That military picnics, as our war [in the Department of the South] has too much resembled, is cruelty to both parties and offensive to God.

Prefiguring the Union high command's conclusion the following year, French believed that the most merciful course was indiscriminate slaughter and devastation sufficient to compel the Confederacy to surrender. Accordingly, French was eager to capitalize on General Hunter's promise "to let me preach the first sermon in Charleston, or if [it is] destroyed, then to *sow the city with salt*. The first will be a great privilege, but the latter, a *greater one*."¹³⁷

When reading the foregoing justifications for war, one gets the feeling that they are not reasons as much as rationalizations, at least for Mansfield French. He was not alone; most abolitionists before the war were staunch pacifists like he was. Yet as James M. McPherson notes, "when confronted by a choice between a (potentially) antislavery war and a proslavery peace . . . most abolitionists did not hesitate to choose war. Much as they loved peace, they hated slavery more."¹³⁸

French sought to go beyond theory. Just as Rufus Saxton had argued early on that a black soldier fighting for freedom would strike harder than a white man fighting for Union, French had a vision of a holy black legion that would smite the Confederacy, free the slaves, and end the war. Late in 1863, love for deluded rebels was a distant memory:

March five thousand of these wronged, and injured victims, against their cruel, guilty oppressors—let it be trumpeted in advance, by a hundred negroes that the

¹³⁷ M. French to George Lansing and E. Taylor, April 9, 1863, FFP.

¹³⁸ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 52-55.

“day of jubilee” had come, and that the avengers of man-stealing were commissioned of God and father Abraham [Lincoln], like the Jews under Ahasuerus, “to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.” Esther 8. 11. Let this be done—and you would see such a panic, as when the Syrians fled, through fear, from Samaria [2 Kings 7:6-7]. If the sun and moon would stand still, and God himself drop down “great stones from heaven” to aid Joshua in routing the confederates of Canaan [Joshua 10:11-14], how much more would God lend aid to “the flock of slaughter” [Zechariah 11:7]. The rebels would see justice in such a war, conscience would sting them, guilty fears would overwhelm them, it would be war with them, not against “Yankee abolitionists,” but against *God himself*, who is “a man of war” [Exodus 15:3], when waged in his name for his glory and for the right.¹³⁹

Therefore, with the support of Generals Hunter and Saxton, French set out to marshal the hosts of Israel.

The 1st South Carolina Volunteers

When David Hunter, commander of the Department of the South, unilaterally emancipated the contrabands in Union-occupied Sea Islands on April 13, 1862, Gideon’s Band rejoiced. On May 9 Hunter took the further dramatic step of declaring free all slaves in the states of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. Abolitionists everywhere were thrilled. President Lincoln, however, quickly tempered their enthusiasm by countermanding Hunter’s order out of fear that allying his administration with emancipation would turn loyal border states, especially Kentucky, over to the Confederacy. Lincoln did not condemn Hunter’s proclamation per se but he reserved the authority to make it to himself. This tactful message left disappointed abolitionists some

¹³⁹ “‘Freedmen’ at Port Royal,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1862; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, October 10, 1863, SPC.

reason for hope, while at the same time maintaining pressure on loyal slaveholders to accept the government's offer of monetary compensation for freeing their slaves. Nevertheless, the government refused to acknowledge, supply, or pay Hunter's new regiment of black enlisted men, the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry, due to border-state sensitivities—the same policy the administration had conducted toward similar units raised in Kansas and Louisiana. Unable to uniform, equip, or pay his men, by August the frustrated Hunter sent his recruits home except for one company. Feeling officially rebuked, unsupported, and stymied in his intention to raise a force large enough to expand the Federal foothold on the Atlantic coast, Hunter expected to be relieved of duty.¹⁴⁰

French was angry and perplexed over this reversal although he was unsurprised by Lincoln's action. As was increasingly becoming a habit, French wrote to Salmon P. Chase to urge the Treasury Secretary to use his influence in the Cabinet to sustain Hunter. "Genl. Hunter's 'Order 11' giving freedom to the slaves in his command had my unqualified approbation as a measure *honorable* to his command, *just to the slaves* and necessary, to fully & finally crush the rebellion & give to the country a *pure & righteous* peace," French wrote on June 13. "I as much believe Genl. Hunter was guided [by God] in that matter as was Cyrus in his movements upon Babylon." French heaped lengthy praise on Hunter as "a rare man, a pure man, a good christian man . . . worthy of immortal honors" and compared him to Queen Esther's kinsman Mordecai, who despite persecution by the wicked royal adviser Haman was paraded through the streets in glory

¹⁴⁰ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 122-27; Levine, *Fall of the House*, 137-38.

for his loyalty both to the government and to his oppressed people. French begged Chase to prevent Hunter, the Gideonites' ally, from being removed. Saxton had not yet arrived at Port Royal to take charge as military governor, and French feared that that assignment would also be cancelled, leaving the missionaries' work unprotected in the face of an unsympathetic military—its own.¹⁴¹

Saxton did arrive, of course, but support for the 1st South Carolina did not. This was no small matter. Setting aside the hope of increasing the army's strength to gain more ground on the coast, the number of white troops stationed on the Sea Islands was decreasing as units were being transferred to assist General George B. McClellan's campaign against the Confederacy's capital, Richmond. Gideonites began worrying that their lives and the lives of the contrabands were threatened by the Confederates, who had started conducting exploratory raids. Even worse was the possibility that Washington might abandon the post altogether as indefensible with the forces available, which would expose every black person on the islands to reenslavement and abort the Port Royal Experiment entirely. If white troops were leaving, black troops were needed to guard the civilians who remained.¹⁴²

French hoped to succeed where Hunter had failed. In August he proposed to Saxton that he travel to Washington as Saxton's emissary to ask Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton in person for permission to raise a battalion of five thousand unarmed black military laborers to be uniformed and paid a soldier's wage. Stanton had earlier allowed

¹⁴¹ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, June 13, 1862, SPC.

¹⁴² Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 90-91.

Saxton to make preparations for a labor corps of one to two thousand men along these lines, so the secretary's approval of this new request was virtually assured. Yet this formal request was in fact a pretext for a much larger proposal. French hoped that when Stanton explicitly authorized the formation of the labor battalion, the laborers might be the nose of the camel under the administration's tent to make the way for enlistment of combat soldiers at Port Royal. Saxton approved French's plan.¹⁴³

Ever the publicist, French shrewdly departed South Carolina with a companion, a remarkable escaped slave named Robert Smalls. Smalls had been a pilot on a steamship called the *Planter* anchored in Charleston Harbor and loaded with artillery. One night when the white officers and crewmen went into town and left the vessel in Smalls' custody, Smalls and the family and associates he had smuggled aboard boldly cast off, sailed out of the harbor into the Union blockade, ran up the white flag, and turned over the ship and its cargo to Federal authorities. The story was picked up in the Northern press, and Smalls became a sensation. He was the perfect example of how daring, loyal, and intelligent a black man could be for the Union cause, and he was a curiosity that even official Washington could not help but take a look at.¹⁴⁴

French's timing was perfect, because unbeknownst to him and Saxton, events in the deep counsels of the Lincoln administration had readied Stanton for their request. In July Lincoln had called for another three hundred thousand volunteers, and Northern governors were having increasing difficulty filling their quotas as the public grew weary

¹⁴³ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:334. Mansfield French to Edwin M. Stanton, October 24, 1865; W-2260; 1865; M619, roll 0442.

¹⁴⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 126-27.

of war. Public approval for enlisting blacks to fill the gap increased enough for Congress to pass two laws, the Confiscation Act and the Militia Act, which gave the president explicit permission to raise black troops. A unit of blacks formed in Indiana to seize the opportunity and asked to be mustered in. At the time Lincoln refused, believing that whatever help would come from black enlistees would be thoroughly offset by border-state defectors to the Confederate cause. Over the course of a mere couple of weeks, however, the president started to change his mind as he contemplated the possibility of arming blacks to hold territory already captured or even to conduct raids against Confederate-allied Indian tribes. At the very same time, having become convinced that slavery gave the Confederates an advantage that the Union could not overcome, Lincoln took the momentous step of informing his Cabinet of his intention to issue a historic ultimatum: a proclamation of emancipation of all slaves in rebel-held territory on January 1, 1863 if the Confederacy did not surrender by that date. Secretary of State William H. Seward suggested that the proclamation would have a much better reception among Northern voters and foreign powers if issued after a Union military victory rather than in the aftermath of McClellan's bungled campaign against Richmond. Lincoln agreed, and the Cabinet kept the plan a secret.¹⁴⁵

On August 24, French and Smalls arrived in Washington, and after they called on Chase they proceeded to the War Department. Although Saxton's written petition was about military laborers, French's conversation with Secretary Stanton ranged much wider. To French's delight, Stanton expressed support for enlisting blacks at Port Royal as

¹⁴⁵ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 196; Levine, *Fall of the House*, 145-46, 154-55; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 504-5.

combat soldiers and invited him back the next day. When French returned Stanton gave him new orders for Saxton. In the orders Stanton brusquely pointed out that when he sent Saxton South he gave the general permission to organize the labor force that he was now asking for, but Stanton spelled it out in writing nonetheless. Then the secretary took a long step further:

In view of the small force under your command and the inability of the Government at the present time to increase it, in order to guard the plantations and settlements occupied by the United States from invasion and protect the inhabitants thereof from captivity and murder by the enemy, you are also authorized to arm, uniform, equip, and receive into the service of the United States such number of volunteers of African descent as you may deem expedient, not exceeding 5,000. . . .

That was not all. Stanton also ordered Saxton to use the troops he raised to conduct raids against rebel territory to draw away their slaves and sap their labor force. Finally, Stanton affirmed that by virtue of the Militia Act all black men in government service, laborer and soldier alike, and also their dependents were officially free.¹⁴⁶

Stanton warned French that this order “must never see daylight, because it was so much in advance of public sentiment.” Stanton had strong antislavery leanings and—assuming that he and Lincoln had no private, unrecorded conversation on the matter—he took a step ahead of his chief. Yet he knew where Lincoln’s mind was going on the question of enlisting blacks, especially for defending occupied territory. He also knew that if Indiana, just over the river from Kentucky, was the worst place to arm black volunteers, then isolated South Carolina, far from the main theaters of action and with no

¹⁴⁶ *War of the Rebellion*, I, 14:377-78. In 1876 French claimed to possess the original order in Stanton’s handwriting, but the document is not among the French Family Papers. See M. French to Samuel Hunt, January 5, 1876, FFP.

native white civilians dwelling there, might have been the best. Stanton probably reasoned that making this decision under his own name gave Lincoln plausible deniability if the orders were discovered.¹⁴⁷

Stanton's order was a total triumph for French and Saxton's hopes, but French's successes in Washington were not yet complete. The secretary directed French to show Saxton's new orders to Henry W. Halleck, the Union's general-in-chief. When he did so, French took the opportunity to complain about the troop transfers from the Department of the South and the resultant danger that the Federal hold on the Sea Islands would be lost. French also complained about General John Brannan, who was poised to assume command of the department since Hunter requested a transfer to a more active assignment, because Brannan had already displayed marked disdain for Saxton and the mission to the contrabands. In response Halleck gave French orders to give to Brannan to the effect that no more of Brannan's cavalry would be called for, that he must cooperate with Saxton's new orders, and that all blacks on the Sea Islands under Federal control were to be defended from attack and abduction. Between the orders to Saxton and the orders to Brannan, the Port Royal Experiment was made secure from enemy overthrow. French did not exaggerate when he told the American Missionary Association that "I

¹⁴⁷ M. French to Samuel Hunt, January 5, 1876, FFP. In addition to Chase and Stanton, French also took Smalls to see Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles during their several days in Washington. They almost certainly did not see Lincoln, who is conspicuously absent from French's account of his journey; see Mansfield French to George Whipple, August 28, 1862, AMA 15901. Dorothy Sterling's fine juvenile biography of Robert Smalls (*Captain of the Planter: The Story of Robert Smalls* [New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958]) includes a fictionalized account of French and Smalls' visits to both Stanton and Lincoln (106-14). Although Sterling's book is well-researched, understandably she cited no sources in the flow of the text. Okon Edet Uya's study of Smalls (*From Slavery to Public Service: Robert Smalls 1839-1915* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1971]) also claims that he and French saw Lincoln, but surprisingly Uya only cited Sterling's book as evidence.

have accomplished *all* I came for.”¹⁴⁸

French hurried back to Port Royal just in time to stop the department’s cavalry from being transferred. On September 5 he went back north to Washington (accompanying the departing Hunter and also Saxton, who was on his way to complain about Brannan himself) en route to New York for a short personal leave. French took advantage of his time in the city to drum up more public support both for the Port Royal Experiment and for the enlistment of blacks in the army. In an era when public lectures were a popular form of entertainment, it helped greatly that French was a dynamic speaker. French gave a lecture at Congregationalist George B. Cheever’s progressive Church of the Puritans that riveted the packed house. French was careful to portray the blacks at Port Royal in unalloyed, glowing terms. Describing the contrabands’ hard work and ingenuity, French told how they had cultivated much ground for themselves (more in food than in cotton) with extra to sell and how they were saving money. “[N]ot only was their zeal in this work of self-emancipation from poverty a marvel,” French said according to the *New York Times*, “but so cheerful and contented were they withal, that there was no danger whatever should they universally gain their freedom that the North would be overrun with them, and the price of labor [decline], but the contrary would hold good.” These were huge worries among bigoted Northerners, even among those of an antislavery bent. Indeed, French predicted that the South would be even more productive under free labor than it had under slavery—all under the supervision of Northern

¹⁴⁸ *War of the Rebellion*, I, 14:378; Mansfield French to George Whipple, August 28, 1862, AMA 15901.

farmers.¹⁴⁹

After speaking at length on the contrabands' freshly improved domiciles, their religious devotion, and their skyrocketing educational attainments, French discoursed on black men's aptitude for military service. French declared that Hunter was highly pleased with the blacks that he recruited, only disbanding them because of the abuse they suffered from white soldiers and because the War Department would not supply them with arms. Then French issued bitter invective against "pro-slavery Union generals," which met with showers of applause from the friendly audience, although there were a few hisses mixed in when French pilloried the popular McClellan, who at that moment was in the field moving to confront the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia's invasion of Maryland. According to the *Times*, French asserted that

the Government, in endeavoring to exclude universal freedom from the contest, was fighting against Omnipotence; that God has his hand upon the nation's pulse, and would dig its grave if that pulse beat not true to liberty; that this war was upon the Negro Question, and not about JEFF. DAVIS and the South; and that [a] man must be blind who [does] not see in what was occurring there, the doom of Slavery. . . .¹⁵⁰

The climax of the lecture came when French grandly introduced to the audience Robert Smalls, "the Hero of the *Planter*," who proceeded to tell of his daring exploits. Then French told the story of two of the five other former slaves in attendance, who sneaked into Union lines from Charleston in rice casks. French concluded by announcing where donations for the Port Royal mission could be sent and also where people could inquire who were interested in employing the freedmen present. When the meeting

¹⁴⁹ Holland, 90-91; "The Freedmen of the South," *New York Times*, September 15, 1862.

¹⁵⁰ "The Freedmen of the South," *New York Times*, September 15, 1862.

ended, dazzled listeners clustered wonderingly around the contrabands to congratulate them. Republican-friendly newspapers published it all. It was a total public relations coup. As if to validate French's speech, Lincoln announced his emancipation proclamation eight days later following the Union's strategic victory at the Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg).¹⁵¹

French was back on the Sea Islands in mid-October. Flushed with success in military politics, French wrote to Chase imploring him to get Stanton to remove Brannan from command for resisting Saxton's efforts to raise black troops and conduct operations. French was a bit behind. Saxton's pleas had already been heard, and Brannan was being replaced by Ormsby M. Mitchel, although Brannan was retained in the department. Additionally, regardless of his views of blacks, Brannan was understandably disgruntled at the formation of a military force within his geographic jurisdiction that was independent of his command. Mitchel, who was far more cooperative with Saxton, agreed. Even Saxton came to see that his men ought to be incorporated into the departmental command, because they required logistical and transportation support from the rest of the department that Saxton could not compel. In a few months the consolidation was done.¹⁵²

In the meantime, however, French was not finished trying to pull the strings of military brass behind its back. Soon after his arrival at Port Royal, French and Saxton traveled to observe the Union defeat at the Battle of Pocotaligo, where Mitchel

¹⁵¹ "The Freedmen of the South," *New York Times*, September 15, 1862.

¹⁵² Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, October 14, 1862, SPC; *War of the Rebellion*, 1, 14:190, 385.

endeavored to sever the rail line between Charleston and Savannah, Georgia. French wrote to Chase “in *strident confidence*” that Hunter and Saxton excelled Mitchel in prudence while Mitchel surpassed them in ambition. French yearned for Hunter to return or better yet for Saxton to be made departmental commander. Unfortunately for French, Mitchel died of disease soon after and the hated General Brannan was put back in command until January.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, Saxton had gone to work organizing a mission to prove to a still skeptical army and public that blacks would make good soldiers. Saxton conceived a raid up coastal rivers between Fernandina, Florida and St. Simons Island, Georgia. His objectives were, “first . . . to prove the fighting qualities of the negroes (which some have doubted),” but also to draw away slaves into Union protection, to destroy Confederate salt evaporation ponds, and to disrupt coastal picket stations. To make this happen, however, Saxton needed plenty of help. He only had one company of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers ready to fight while he was busily trying to raise the rest of the regiment, so he needed a white regiment to do most of the work. He also needed naval support. Once again French saw that Saxton got what he needed, this time by going all the way to the top. French probably stopped in Washington on the way back from New York in late September or early October and had his first and only recorded visit with Abraham Lincoln. As French told the story, Lincoln “feared that his proclamation had only struck in skin deep,” probably because it only freed slaves still under Confederate control where Union forces would have to conquer in order to take them away from the

¹⁵³ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, October 23, 1862, SPC.

Southern war effort. Moreover, Lincoln sighed, “The age of miracles was past, and manna no longer fell from heaven. He feared that if all the slaves were set free they would starve.” French, who fervently believed in miracles, confidently answered, “If you give the negroes a chance, they will make the proclamation strike in to the bone. As for manna, the slaves have raised manna for the rebels to eat, let us have transportation and we will take it away from them.” “You shall have the means,” Lincoln replied.

Accordingly, Saxton received the 48th New York Volunteers commanded by Oliver T. Beard, whom Saxton tapped to lead the expedition accompanied by the thirty-five soldiers of Company A of the 1st South Carolina. Saxton also was given the steamship *Darlington* to transport the troops and the gunboat *Potomska* captained by William Budd.¹⁵⁴

Saxton also sent the golden-tongued Chaplain French on the raid in order to recruit blacks at St. Simons and Fernandina. As it turned out, French’s eloquence was unnecessary (even if it helped), because the contrabands knew by now that enlistment meant freedom for themselves and for their families, including those still enslaved. Twenty-seven men from St. Simons quickly volunteered, and they and their dependents were taken on board the *Darlington*. At the expedition’s next stop, Fernandina, a large meeting was assembled to hear French and Beard call for recruits. In almost no time 125 volunteered. The local commander and the quartermaster insisted that most of these men were needed in Fernandina as laborers and only let twenty-five unemployed men go, but twenty-nine more stowed away on the *Darlington* and emerged itching to fight. All the

¹⁵⁴ *War of the Rebellion*, I, 14:189; clipping (probably from the *Boston Daily Advertiser*), 3F20-025, FFP.

recruits were armed and given hurried, elementary training before going to work the next day.¹⁵⁵

Over the course of about a week, the expedition made thirteen landings, displaced all pickets and destroyed all salt-works where the force landed, took whatever food stores, wagons, and supplies like leather that it could carry and torched the rest, killed all the horses it found, and repeatedly withdrew before the Confederates could mass a counterattack. Wherever the steamer stopped and blew its whistle, enslaved men, women, and children flocked to the boats of the landing parties. The men were given rifles at once and immediately joined the effort to free others. On the first day of fighting, a substantial contingent of Confederates emerged from the woods and fired on the black troops rowing back to the steamer. French reported that “they coolly loaded and fired on their assailants, killing two and losing none, though their boats and the steamer were well peppered,” until getting under cover of its guns. The sharpest fighting took place on November 7, when the *Darlington* twice passed a wooded bluff covering a wide bend of the Sapelo River where Confederates eventually numbering between eighty and one hundred were positioned. Several of them fell to the Federals’ fire; three black soldiers were wounded in the exchange. At the mouth of the river Lieutenant Colonel Beard ordered the burning of the buildings on two plantations belonging to Confederate officers to prevent their further use by rebel pickets—and probably also out of spite, as one of the owners was an

¹⁵⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Reply to “The Affectionate and Christian Address of Many Thousands of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, to Their Sisters, the Women of the United States of America”* (London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co., 1863), 30-33.

outrageously cruel master of some of the freedmen on the expedition.¹⁵⁶

The black soldiers impressed everyone with their courage and discipline under fire. Colonel Beard reported, “The colored men fought with astonishing coolness and bravery. For alacrity in effecting landings, for determination, and for bush fighting I found them all I could desire—more than I had hoped. They behaved bravely, gloriously, and deserve all praise.” Lieutenant Budd, whose gunboat joined the action at the bluff, testified,

They behaved splendidly under the warm and galling fire, we were exposed to, in the two skirmishes with the enemy. I did not see a man flinch, contrary to my expectations. One of them particularly came under my notice, who although badly wounded in the face, continued to load and fire in the coolest manner imaginable. Every one of them acted like veterans.

Moreover, Saxton noted that the black troops made no attempts at vindictive brutality against defeated enemies; although they hardly had opportunity to do so in this raid, this was a major concern of Union commanders.¹⁵⁷

Some of what we know about the expedition comes from Beard’s official report to Saxton, which the general included in his report to Stanton. Most of the details, however, were published by French as widely as he could in order to prove the fitness of black men as soldiers; in a time of war this was critical evidence of blacks’ equality with whites. French gave an account to *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley and another to famed author Harriet Beecher Stowe, who included it in a work she published in Great

¹⁵⁶ *War of the Rebellion*, I, 14:190-92; Horace Greeley, “The Negro in the War for the Union,” *The Independent*, November 20, 1862; Stowe, *Reply*, 33-43.

¹⁵⁷ *War of the Rebellion*, I, 14:190-92; William Budd to M. French, November 7, 1862, FFP.

Britain.¹⁵⁸ French also took the tale to the public himself. Before November was out he was back at the Church of the Puritans in New York regaling his audience with the story of the fledgling 1st South Carolina's bravery. He collected an offering of 120 dollars, which he used on the church's behalf to buy a national flag, a regimental flag embroidered with the words, "The Year of Jubilee Has Come!", and two guidons for the regiment. At some point during his travels in the autumn of 1862, French met Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew in Washington, who was so impressed with the minister that he urged him to tell of the Port Royal Experiment in Boston. On December 7 French was introduced by Andrew as the chaplain of the 1st South Carolina to an assembled audience at Boston's Tremont Temple Baptist Church. French thanked Andrew for his gracious introduction, gently correcting him that he was not actually "worthy of the honor" of being called the regiment's chaplain, and then he returned the favor by publicly endorsing Andrew for President of the United States. After this rousing start, French lectured for an hour and forty minutes to tumultuous applause. Had they known, the Bostonians at Port Royal would have been sorely vexed that the Bostonians in Boston loved French.¹⁵⁹

On the way back to Port Royal French stopped again in Washington and gained the privilege of preaching at the public worship service that met every Sabbath in the chamber of the House of Representatives. Worshipers were startled when French converted their Sunday service into "[a]n old-fashioned Anti-Slavery meeting." He spoke

¹⁵⁸ See preceding notes.

¹⁵⁹ M. French to M. J. French, December 4, 1862, FFP; Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 86; "The Contrabands at Port Royal," *The Liberator*, December 12, 1862; clipping (3F18-013), FFP.

with such unabashed vigor that many left the service before he finished, especially when he noted that black children in the interior had already learned the song “John Brown’s Body.” According to French, the blacks claimed that they had already been told directly by God that slavery was over. In the words of one observer, French insisted that the Union would never succeed in the war “until we were willing to do full justice to the slaves; that for his part he was determined to take his place by the side of the poor negro, to live with him, and to die and go to heaven with him.” Even for many abolitionists, much less among other whites, French’s uninhibited aspiration to fraternize with blacks was shocking. He was a racial egalitarian to his core.¹⁶⁰

French arrived back in South Carolina in time for the most joyous and most widely publicized event in the difficult history of the Port Royal Experiment. Rufus Saxton had finished filling, equipping, and officering the 1st South Carolina, naming Thomas Wentworth Higginson its commander. Colonel Higginson was a radical, Romantic, Transcendentalist, Unitarian minister from Massachusetts who had marshaled citizens to use force to resist extraditions under the Fugitive Slave Act and had openly supported John Brown’s failed attempt to incite a slave insurrection. Higginson accepted his new command with relish. Saxton now prepared for a grand celebration of Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation which was to be issued on January 1, 1863. The proclamation was written to exclude explicitly almost all slaves in Union-occupied portions of the South, loyal and otherwise, but the Federal footholds on the Atlantic coast were conspicuously left out of the exemptions. That meant that on New Year’s Day, the blacks

¹⁶⁰ A. J. Grover, “Rev. Mr. French at the Capital,” *The Liberator*, December 15, 1862, 208.

at Port Royal truly would no longer be contrabands but would be “forever free.” The year of jubilee—the fiftieth year in Israelite law, when debts were cancelled, slaves were freed, and land reverted to the dispossessed—had come.¹⁶¹

On January 1 the warm southern sun looked through a cloudless sky on the thousands of freedmen assembling at Camp Saxton, the home of the 1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry. A three-hour program of speeches, songs, and poems commenced. The president’s proclamation was read by a new arrival to the islands, an important Treasury Department employee named William Henry Brisbane. Dr. Brisbane was actually returning home; he had been a rare slaveowning planter in lowcountry South Carolina who was converted to the abolitionist cause, freed his slaves, gave up his plantation, and moved to Wisconsin. The doctor was to play a critical role in the future of the blacks on the Sea Islands that was just beginning to unfold.¹⁶²

The high point of the day’s proceedings came when French stood to present the colors he brought from New York to Colonel Higginson and his regiment. Primed for the occasion, French gave it his best in an “excellent and enthusiastic speech” that touched the hearts of the black audience like only he could. When he finished and handed the flags to Higginson, two or three black attenders spontaneously responded by singing, “My country, ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.” Others gradually joined in. The whites were awed; Higginson was dumbstruck. “I never saw anything so electric,” he wrote; “it made all other words cheap, it seemed the choked voice of a race, at last

¹⁶¹ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 159-62; Leviticus 25.

¹⁶² Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 162; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:354 n. 3.

unloosed. . . . Just think of it; the first day they had ever had a country, the first flag they had ever seen which promised anything to their people. . . .” No one could remember ever hearing this musical people sing that song before. When it ended, there was silence for a moment. Then Higginson said that “he could give no answer so appropriate and touching as had just been made,” nevertheless proceeding with an eloquent address. Higginson called up two of the black noncommissioned officers of the regiment and put the colors into their hands. They spoke with no less power than French and Higginson, vowing to guard the colors with their lives and to fly them before Jefferson Davis in Richmond.¹⁶³

As military organization of blacks on the islands progressed, it yielded a range of benefits for the Port Royal mission. The Northern public could now see evidence that the mission was yielding important benefits for the Union—it mattered. The threat that the islands might suddenly be evacuated was gone. As troop numbers grew, the Union foothold spread, which set more slaves free and opened up more territory where missionary teachers could establish schools (as for example in Jacksonville, Florida, where French preached in March after the 1st South Carolina captured the city). The men themselves had greater access to education as soldiers than as farmhands. For that matter, military service was an education in itself. All whites who spent time observing black men in uniform concluded that it instilled self-respect and self-discipline in them like nothing else. The previous November, while the *Darlington* was carrying the new recruits away from the skirmish on the Sapelo River, French asked the men if they had grown that

¹⁶³ Brenda E. Stevenson, ed., *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 430; Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 85-87; “New Year’s Day at Port Royal,” *The Circular*, Jan. 22, 1863, 199; Christopher Looby, ed., *The Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 76-77; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:352.

day. “Oh, yes, Massa, we have grown three inches!” came one answer. “I feel a heap more of a man!” said another. Northerners were beginning to believe that the black soldier was “more of a man” also, although it would not sink deep into Northern opinion until word came of the bloody sacrifice of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, the first black regiment raised in a free state, in a doomed assault near Charleston Harbor in July 1863. The new respect given blacks after that battle reminded French of how the Jews who defended themselves from attack in Esther’s day so impressed their neighbors that many of them became Jews as well. “[M]any even of the military . . . cordially espouse the cause of the black man & are ready to share the common perils for his freedom & the country’s weal. This is marvellous indeed. God only can be praised for producing, so wonderful a change.”¹⁶⁴

The Emancipation Proclamation and the enlistment of black troops signalled a momentous departure in Union war policy. “No longer would the war be fought just to preserve the Union, and certainly not the ‘Union as it was,’ ” writes Harry S. Stout. “Henceforth, it would be a much bigger war—one that would reweave the South’s social fabric in a revolutionary way and ensure that postbellum America would be radically different from antebellum America.” The Republican government had dramatically upped the ante by explicitly making indiscriminate war on Southern private property—the universal and permanent confiscation of slaves regardless of their functions or their masters’ loyalties. The planter-dominated Confederate elite, facing the loss of everything

¹⁶⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 160-61; M. French to A. French, March 2, 1863, FFP; *War of the Rebellion*, III, 3:435; Stowe, *Reply*, 42; Mansfield French to George Whipple, July 30, 1863, AMA H5230. In February French also went to St. Augustine, Florida on an unusual errand—a marshal fell sick, so French was responsible to exchange a hundred captured Confederate soldiers for Union prisoners-of-war; see M. French to H. French, February 19, 1863, FFP.

it seceded to safeguard, could be counted on to match the bet and do anything to prevent defeat. There was no turning back now—just as French prophesied that God intended.¹⁶⁵

The militarization of freedmen was entwined with a fateful shift from limited war to total war—a war not between armies but between nations, in which entire economies were both mobilized and targeted for destruction—a war in which the line separating soldiers as legitimate objects of violence from civilians faded to near nothingness—a war in which the principles of just war theory no longer applied. How did plundering slaves from rebel masters to set them free fit or not fit the strictures of a limited war? To liberate slaves was to plunder civilians' property. Yet in certain cases, and potentially in all, they were also war materiel. Transcending that puzzle, abolitionists and planters both recognized before anyone else that the substantive basis of the war was not a constitutional conflict but whether slavery was legitimate in America or not. To French, liberating the slaves was not a war *means* but the war *aim*. The slaves were not an impersonal asset; they were human beings in need of rescue who aroused his zealous compassion.

Yet to the Republican government, the blacks *were* an asset to one side and a potential asset to the other, and that was the justification for setting them free. Aside from abstruse ethical questions, enlisting blacks coincided with other actions of total war that were quite blunt all by themselves. The coastal raid by the 48th New York and the 1st South Carolina's Company A makes that abundantly clear. In addition to taking as much food as they could—which could well be justified by the hungry army and the thousands

¹⁶⁵ Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 211-12.

of contrabands it had to feed—the raiders destroyed whatever they could not take in order to inflict hunger upon their victims. Total warfare is equally evident in the primary strategic target of the operation: salt evaporation ponds whose supreme purpose was the preservation of food, especially for transport to Confederate armies. Outside of specific conditions—for example, the capture of a wagon train en route to an enemy force—there is no way to attack the food supply of an army without threatening noncombatants’ provisions as well, for armies and governments take the food they need, from their own people if they must. As early as 1862, then, the Union command took the first, probing steps toward starving the Confederacy into submission—soldiers and civilians, men and women, children and elderly. This was a severe judgment, but French shed no tears, because there would be no righteous peace until the Canaanites repented or were annihilated.¹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, while the government officially accepted blacks as soldiers—and perhaps soon, the nation would accept them as men—that did not mean that its motivation was pure as French defined it. Abolitionists and the bulk of Republicans could

¹⁶⁶ Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 230-34, 445-46. In mid-1863 a new officer arrived at Port Royal; James Montgomery, a harsh veteran of the brutal guerilla war over slavery in Kansas and Missouri, was given command of the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers. On June 10 he ordered his regiment and the 54th Massachusetts (over the objections of its commander, Robert Gould Shaw) to plunder all valuables and then burn to the ground the unoccupied and defenseless town of Darien, Georgia. In the entry for Darien in his book, *Georgia Place-Names: Their History and Origins*, 3rd ed. (Macon, GA: Winship Press, 1975), Kenneth K. Krakow alleged that Mansfield French—known as the “White Jesus” by his “Gospel Army of black hymn singing crusaders”—led the burning. This bizarre moniker is unattested elsewhere, and in fact French was in New York at the time of the raid. What French thought of Montgomery’s action, however, is an open question. Montgomery said that Southerners were “to be swept away by the hand of God like the Jews of old.” Whether he meant the Jews as the objects or as the instruments of God’s wrath is uncertain. The latter notion was not foreign to French’s thought, as has been demonstrated. Montgomery and one of his subordinates asked French later in 1863 to use his pull in Washington to get Montgomery promoted to brigadier general and invested with a command large enough to invade and reclaim Florida. It is not known whether French considered Montgomery worthy of recommendation, but he did strongly wish to see a campaign along those lines. See Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 204-6; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, June 9, 1863, SPC; M. J. French to W. French, June 6, 1863, FFP; James Montgomery to M. French, December 15, 1863, FFP; A. A. Knight to M. French, December 18, 1863, FFP; p. 382 below.

agree that Emancipation and Union went together forever after, but that did not mean that the twin goals were weighted by both parties the same way. In Willie Lee Rose's brilliant analysis, the pressing questions were

how the nation could help the black man help himself, and how the black man could help the nation survive. . . . But men have far more trouble in establishing an ordering of values than in agreeing upon what things are good and right. At last the nation ranked the second good above the first commitment, and the failure of Reconstruction to provide the freedmen with real opportunities for education and economic freedom was the final result. It was the great moral failure of the nation.¹⁶⁷

Confiscation and Sale: The First Battle for Land

As 1862 turned to 1863, the government and the societies involved with the Port Royal Experiment celebrated the ingathered cotton crop, which though disappointing compared to other harvests was not bad given the inexperience, late start, and other disadvantages of that year of upheaval. At the same time, however, the government was taking steps to divest itself of the plantations it owned *de facto* and to earn revenue not by selling cotton but by selling land.¹⁶⁸

In the summer of 1861, Congress had passed a direct tax on each state in order to finance the war. Importantly, "each state" included the states in rebellion, which of course went delinquent in their payments. Almost a year later, Congress passed another law that instructed the executive branch how to collect the tax from the uncooperative states. Whenever a portion of the state came under Union control, the president was to send tax commissioners there to convert the tax on the state into a tax on landowners. The

¹⁶⁷ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 171-72.

¹⁶⁸ *First Annual Report*, 1-2.

proportion of the state's direct tax burden that each landowner owed was the same as the proportionate value of his or her property relative to the aggregate property value of the entire state as assessed in 1861. The tax commissioners were to give notice that the tax plus a fifty percent penalty was due within sixty days or else the property would be confiscated and sold to the highest bidder for an amount not less than what the property owner owed. Qualified buyers had to be loyal to the government and able to pay at least a quarter of the purchase price down and the rest within three years. It was this task that brought self-exiled William Henry Brisbane back to the Sea Islands in October 1862 as one of the three tax commissioners for South Carolina, accompanied by William E. Wording and former judge Abram D. Smith.¹⁶⁹

At the time of the commissioners' arrival Rufus Saxton was primarily occupied with organizing the 1st South Carolina, but by December the commissioners' presence began worrying him. What would be the result when the plantations were subdivided and put up for auction? Saxton expected that Northern speculators concerned only for profit and not at all for the well-being of the soon-to-be freedpeople would snatch the land up for much less than the lands were worth but more than the freedpeople could pay. Then the former slaves would be at the mercy of the capitalists, not that of good-hearted missionaries and their benevolent governor. They might be ground down to low wages, or whatever they agreed to work for might be withheld if the new overseers could get away with it—it could be like the situation with the cotton agents all over again. They might even be evicted in favor of Northern workers or foreign immigrants. Even in the best

¹⁶⁹ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 164-66; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, October 23, 1862, SPC.

possible outcome, however—stable employment for modest but livable wages—blacks would still be a class of laborers strictly dependent on white landowners for everything, including a place to live. Although circumstances might be substantially better than under slavery—no corporal punishment, no separation of families, ongoing education—it still fell far short of making blacks fully free as Saxton understood it. At least as far back as February Saxton envisioned the abandoned plantations divided into homesteads in the freedpeople’s secure possession sufficiently large to raise enough food to live. As Saxton saw it, for a black family to own its own home outright and to have the farming capacity to prevent starvation was the minimum economic standard of freedom. Saxton had been willing to put off this dream in the face of more pressing concerns, but the tax sales now jeopardized it.¹⁷⁰

Consequently, on December 7 Saxton wrote to Secretary Edwin M. Stanton with a request that did not reflect his ideal but at least gave the freedpeople a measure of protection and bought some time. Saxton suggested that Congress pass a law to set aside lands from the upcoming tax auction at the rate of three acres per adult and one acre per child currently residing in Federal-held territory. These plots would remain in government possession and be rented to the freedmen at a rate of one dollar per acre per year. One month later, with no apparent movement in Washington, French wrote twice to Salmon P. Chase—who appointed the tax commissioners and their supervisor, Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph J. Lewis—endorsing Saxton’s plan. “I am greatly troubled in view of the land sales,” French wrote. “The sharp sighted speculators

¹⁷⁰ See pp. 263-64.

are on hand & with larger purses than those of the friends of humanity.” French noted that most of the strong freedmen (and therefore the best laborers) were absent from the land, either taken by the fleeing planters or employed by or enlisted in the army. Those who remained—women, children, the elderly, and the sick—would surely be rendered homeless by capitalists who would import a superior labor force.¹⁷¹

Chase had suggested that French raise money from New York philanthropists to buy land at the auction at market prices, and then Saxton could parcel it out to the freedmen himself. Yet French did not do so because General Hunter (soon to return to command in the Department of the South) and others had floated a second plan for keeping the freedpeople on the land. Since Saxton had permission to draw from the Treasury’s profit from the 1861-62 cotton crops for food, clothing, and farm equipment for the freedpeople, why could he not use the same money to buy the lands on behalf of the government and then sell them or lease them to the freedpeople, putting the proceeds back into the fund? “Genl Saxton could control the whole matter, as *all* the lands are *worth more* to the *colored people* than to *any one else*.” For this plan to work, however, Saxton required authorization from Stanton, which he had not yet received. Saxton was getting quite discouraged because his efforts had already been frequently undercut and help had not arrived. (French was careful to stress, however, that Saxton still had complete confidence in Chase.)¹⁷²

Simultaneously, yet a third plan to support the freedpeople emerged, this one from

¹⁷¹ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 220-21; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:352-57.

¹⁷² Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:353.

one of the tax commissioners themselves, Abram D. Smith. Like his colleagues, Smith's mission was to liquidate confiscated lands for the best benefit to the government. Unlike them, Smith was much more interested in the questions about the freedpeople's welfare that Saxton and Gideon's Band thought about. Smith therefore also wrote to Chase in early January echoing Saxton's concern about the impact of speculation at the land sales, expressing his belief that private business interests and the law of supply and demand would yield negative outcomes for freedmen living on the land unless the government took action to protect them. Smith raised new themes that would echo profoundly over the ensuing year. First, Smith reported the freedmen's "ardent desire to remain upon the soil, to own a portion of it, or to cultivate it for reasonable wages"—that is, that they wanted to stay where they were. Second, Smith was the first to propose that the confiscated land be "subdivided and offered for sale in small parcels *with the privilege of preemption*" (emphasis mine)—that is, that freed individuals could gain the sole right to purchase particular parcels by squatting on them and cultivating them. Smith predicted a perfect outcome for government interests if this plan were to be followed.¹⁷³

Saxton and French quickly perceived that Smith was a valuable ally, so they urged him to visit Chase personally in Washington to reiterate the danger of speculation. On his trip, Smith also saw radical Republican¹⁷⁴ senator Charles Sumner and some of his colleagues. At Smith's suggestion the senators introduced legislation to amend the direct tax law to allow the government to buy lands at the discretion of the three commissioners

¹⁷³ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 221, 227, 233.

¹⁷⁴ For a definition of the term "radical Republican," see p. 481.

plus Hunter and Saxton for “military, naval, revenue, charitable, educational and police purposes of the Department.” The bill also allowed the tax commissioners themselves to bid on lands on the government’s behalf up to two thirds of their assessed value in order to prevent speculation at lowball prices and to reserve more land for eventual distribution to freedpeople.¹⁷⁵

Smith’s progress was promising, but the tax sales were approaching fast, and there was still no word from Congress. So at the suggestion of teacher Laura Towne, Saxton and Smith asked Hunter to postpone the impending auction until the bill’s fate was known. Hunter assented on February 7, 1863, and the allies breathed easier, but the department soon learned that the legislation had actually passed the day before.¹⁷⁶

The next month the postponed sales took place, but not before the three commissioners, Hunter, and Saxton set aside lands for use by the government for future below-market conveyance to freedmen, which turned out to be almost four fifths of all the land liable for auction. The final disposition of most of the lands, and how precisely the freedpeople would gain a hold of them, was unknown. But for most of them the growing season of 1863 would be like the previous year, working on familiar lands under the supervision of missionary-planters. The freedpeople were safe—for now.¹⁷⁷

Of the land that was sold, some of it did go to speculating strangers. Some of it actually went to enterprising freedpeople who pooled their resources to buy their own plantations and work them collectively. Another fraction went to missionaries who

¹⁷⁵ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 228-29.

¹⁷⁶ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 173-74.

¹⁷⁷ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 176.

spotted a chance to gain some wealth while doing good. But the largest single portion was purchased on behalf of a Boston for-profit joint-stock company whose interests were managed—and whose plantations were legally owned—by missionary Edward S. Philbrick. Philbrick was striking out on his own path for his own reasons that he believed were in the best interests of the freedpeople, but this put him at odds with most of his fellow Gideonites—principally Mansfield French. To infer from French’s words to Chase, Philbrick was no longer one of “the friends of humanity.”¹⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Abram D. Smith’s role in the reservation of lands for the freedpeople did not go unnoticed by French, nor did he fail to see that Smith’s colleagues Brisbane and Wording were less than enthusiastic, they being a good deal more interested in executing the law than altering it. French realized that the actions of the tax commissioners would have a profound impact on the freedpeople’s fate, and his own successes in the Port Royal mission to date—especially with enlisting blacks as soldiers—convinced him that properly motivated workers on the ground had the power to shape policy in Washington. He needed the tax commissioners on the blacks’ side as he saw it. Smith was trustworthy, but he was outnumbered. So French surreptitiously applied to Chase yet again, this time to get the composition of South Carolina’s tax commissioners remade in his favor. “The majority & minority reports of the Tax Commission for Jan[uar]y,” French wrote, “will disclose a broad, & most unfortunate gulf of both opinion and action, between them. It can *never be bridged*. I trust God will give you wisdom to discern which parties have been true to their trust.” Not to put too fine a point on it,

¹⁷⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 176; Mansfield French to American Missionary Association, March 10, 1863, AMA H5192.

French continued, “I must say, what you will be rejoiced to hear, that Judge Smith is as true to his trust, and to the freedmen, as were Caleb & Joshua, to the charge committed to them by Moses.” (These were the two spies scouting out Canaan who attested that God would overcome all obstacles to give Israel the land while the majority of spies doubted.¹⁷⁹) Then French anticipated a mysterious personnel change:

I have faith in God that your last desire, expressed to me in leaving you, concerning [Smith] will be realised. Time will vindicate the *wisdom & fitness* of the *instructions*. Thousands of anxious, burdened hearts are praying for a new commissioner to aid in carrying them out. I doubt not Providence will point you to the man.¹⁸⁰

French’s Critics

Much of the story of the Port Royal Experiment thus far involves the internal divisions among Northerners on the Sea Islands. As the drama around the first tax sales reveals, after a year in South Carolina the discord grew more intense and the factionalism more complex.

The antagonism between Gideon’s Band and the bulk of the army stationed on the islands has already been documented, although this fault line was both muted and complicated by friendly commanders (notably David Hunter) and by the growing proportion of black troops in the garrison. The antagonism between Unitarians mostly from Boston and evangelicals mostly from New York has also been treated at length. It should be noted, however, that despite the plenteous documentary remains of the Port Royal mission, their provenance is predominantly the Boston faction, which proved to be

¹⁷⁹ Numbers 13-14.

¹⁸⁰ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 7, 1863, SPC.

an unusually literary bunch. For this reason, we know a good deal about what Boston missionaries and teachers thought of their colleagues from New York, but we know far less the other way around. In fact, to this author's knowledge, the only private materials from New Yorkers extant are those produced by Mansfield French, much of which has never been viewed by a student of the mission until this study. Additionally, although we know that French did criticize the Unitarian contingent,¹⁸¹ he virtually never did so in writing. The nearest examples are a few vague, oblique references to his undefined "enemies" (which may very well pertain to other Northerners at Port Royal), quite unlike some Bostonians who peppered their journals and letters with frank, acid characterizations of those whom they disliked. Of the individuals sent by Port Royal-related societies, French only criticized two by name in his literary remains, each in only one letter and without vitriol. The contrast between French's writing and that of his critics sampled below displays his laudable equanimity or his willingness to turn the other cheek.

The third city participating in the mission was Philadelphia; its missionaries, though generally of a liberal Christian bent, tended to be idiosyncratic and not easily assigned to a party at Port Royal. Prominent among them were Laura Towne and Reuben Tomlinson. Tomlinson's disapproval of French (examined below), though severe, came more from sober judgment and less from visceral distaste than that of French's other critics.

Meanwhile, with the first round of tax sales a new faction, centered in Edward S.

¹⁸¹ See p. 244.

Philbrick, was emerging from the Boston group. As we have seen, French's abolitionist sympathies turned active following the Compromise of 1850,¹⁸² but in age and mindset he resembled the abolitionist generation of the 1830s, for whom slavery was a moral problem. However, for a large section of the younger generation driven to antislavery convictions in the 1850s, the problem was not only, or in some cases primarily, conflict between morality and immorality but rather a clash of rival economic systems, one backward, the other progressive. Gideonites of this persuasion were certain that free labor was superior *economically* to slave labor, that it paid better for workers, managers, and investors alike. Hearts set afire by the promises of cutting-edge laissez-faire capitalism, they believed that artificial support for blacks—that is, assistance that was given but not worked for and which whites did not receive—was worse than unhelpful; it was destructive. Black individuals needed to learn immediately to rely on no one but themselves, and only the austere laws of supply and demand in a free market could teach the virtues of “responsibility, industry, self-dependence, and manliness.” Furthermore, since people lived according to these virtues when they wanted more material prosperity, then covetousness was in practice a virtue, not a vice. A too-rapid elevation of the blacks' standard of living, therefore, was dangerous, because it was liable to make them content and therefore slothful, which to these missionaries was the supreme Deadly Sin.¹⁸³

Indeed, if blacks learned the economic virtues of middle-class materialism, not only they but also the economic North would benefit. A successful transition to freedom

¹⁸² See pp. 169-70.

¹⁸³ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 42-43, 182.

for four million slaves might vastly expand the consumer base for Northern agricultural and industrial products. In their endeavor to civilize the freedpeople, missionary teachers were already introducing Yankee domestic items and foods into the former slaves' cabins; as we have seen, French himself took a leading part in this initiative. A greatly expanded Southern middle class would have immense consequences for the whole nation's economy, and Northern capitalists would reap an enormous share of the benefits.¹⁸⁴

Despite such calculations, Philbrick and the Boston Gideonites that he hired as supervisors were as keenly attuned to freedpeople's long-range prospects for survival as anyone else. They knew well that the burst of philanthropy in 1862 would not last forever, and they were trying to ready the freedpeople as quickly as possible for an increasingly competitive and merciless world. Moreover, they knew in 1862 and even after the Emancipation Proclamation that a very large number of Northerners were not convinced that freedom for blacks would work either for the blacks or for the nation as a whole. Complete economic collapse and mass starvation in a free, postwar South were frightening possibilities. Like uneducated white laborers, in the long run blacks would only eat if they worked, and black labor would only be "employed, if at all, because it is *profitable*," argued Philbrick. Only economic prosperity could convince whites that blacks deserved to be free. Philbrick and his associates sought to structure a laboratory where blacks themselves would learn that lesson. They strongly believed that blacks were capable of it—their severe prescription was egalitarianism in an unusual guise.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 185; see p. 251-52 above.

¹⁸⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 182-83.

Philbrick and his backers devised their plan in order to give blacks the benefit of a true free labor system under fair and honest managers who intended to keep them all on the land, none of which could be assumed if speculators were the ones to introduce capitalism to the islands. Nevertheless, for the system to resemble the free market accurately, the supervisors, the investors, and Philbrick himself needed to profit from their own efforts also. Under his company's arrangement, Philbrick was to receive a quarter of the net profit of each year's crop after paying investors' interest. In Philbrick's capitalist mindset, his financial gain and the blacks' educational benefit were entirely compatible. Unsurprisingly, to many Gideonites they were not. Evangelicals and many Unitarians were skeptical of Philbrick's motives, and even some Unitarians who concurred with his principles became uncomfortable with his results.¹⁸⁶

As 1863 unfolded, a debate between Philbrick's party and the developing coalition of Port Royalists that opposed it, of which Mansfield French became one of the most vocal members, grew increasingly intense. The debate had deep philosophical underpinnings about the nature of freedom and justice, as Akiko Ochiai has elucidated. Opponents of the capitalists defined freedom as full access and weight in the political process, and assumed that "land-based economic autonomy was the prerequisite for a truly independent citizenry." They were convinced that "if freed slaves were enabled to acquire land, they would establish themselves as a self-supporting yeomanry, empowered to exercise and enjoy the rights and liberties guaranteed to all American citizens by their Constitution." These Gideonites further believed that all blacks were by nature capable of

¹⁸⁶ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 174-77.

being free citizens immediately once the degrading influence of slavery was taken away. Philbrick, on the other hand, saw freedom in economic terms, as the extent of involvement in a capitalist economy as a producer and/or consumer. He believed that only a few blacks were presently capable of freedom of this sort and that the only way to demonstrate their capacity was by race-blind competition with whites—namely, buying land at the price set by the open market. The rest of the freedpeople would not join the ranks of the fully free until they had proven that they had learned industry and thrift by saving the wages that capitalists paid them. The debate in this small corner of the country reflected a much larger social shift as older agrarian notions of freedom were giving way to new industrial ideas about the freedom of a worker to choose his employer and vice versa and as property requirements were being stripped from suffrage laws.¹⁸⁷

Yet if Philbrick's opponents were traditionalists in their land-based republicanism, both sides were avant-garde in their concepts of justice, albeit in boldly contrasting ways. Philbrick viewed special pleading for the freedmen as fundamentally unjust, as errant as privileges available to whites that blacks were denied. His highly individualistic view of justice reflected a growing belief that a democracy that was truly no respecter of persons required an utterly free market to sustain it. Meanwhile, French and others of Philbrick's opponents conceived of plans to bequeath land to freedpeople as a grant or at a bargain as a small reparation for slavery—the least that a government could do to requite the injustice that it had supported for decades. These Gideonites maintained that the people who had actually worked the land for generations had thereby established their right to it,

¹⁸⁷ Akiko Ochiai, "The Port Royal Experiment Revisited: Northern Visions of Reconstruction and the Land Question," *The New England Quarterly* 74, No. 1 (March 2001): 104-6, 110.

not unlike Western squatters who improved uncultivated land. What made this principle so radical is that, unlike with pioneer settlers, an individual plot of ground could not be traced to an individual slave's labor, nor could an individual master's oppression be redressed individually. The coalition that challenged Philbrick, rather, conceived of justice en masse—an undifferentiated, transgenerational group of slaves deservedly inheriting an unpartitioned swath of land. Yet how this justice might be meted on an individual basis—*which* freedman had the right to *what* land belonging to *whom*?—was a tricky question, especially as fugitives from river plantations continued to make their way onto the Sea Islands and began hoping for a piece of the pie.¹⁸⁸

Looming over this debate was the land in government hands as yet undisposed of. The largest influence over its distribution was a faction composed of two, William Henry Brisbane and William E. Wording, the majority of the Direct Tax Commission for South Carolina. Their role in Port Royal's complex strife will be detailed in the next section.

From the beginning of the mission, Mansfield French's salient personality had elicited strong reactions from the fractious community at Port Royal, and well before the mission's first birthday a growing number of Northerners on the islands no longer mitigated their judgments of him. In their eyes, the range of French's faults was wide, and for some the bitterness ran deep. These facts deserve analysis. We enter the examination by leaping ahead to an episode in early 1865 related by Henry Hitchcock, a staff officer of General William Tecumseh Sherman, who encountered French in Beaufort,

the place where the "experiment" of educating the negro, etc., was begun and is going on; [Rufus] Saxton being the Moses and "Father French," who is

¹⁸⁸ Ochiai, "Port Royal Experiment": 107-9.

irreverently called “Holy Joe” by officers who don’t believe him to be more sincere or disinterested than he ought to be, the Aaron of the enterprise. I had seen Mr. F. at Savannah, and heard him hold forth to Gen. Sherman in a tone so like cant, if it was not that, that I could have foretold the impression it would surely produce. I saw him again here; and my first impression of him is bad. He has a face far more sanctimonious than sanctified, and I confess to some amusement at the General’s sharp comments upon his having impressed upon all the negro couples who wished to live together, the necessity of their being duly married—he performing the ceremony *for one dollar apiece!* No doubt it was a lawful fee, etc., etc.,—but it looks bad.¹⁸⁹

Hitchcock’s characterization exemplifies many of the charges hurled at French privately and sometimes publicly from other Northerners in the South. French’s first odious quality was his mission to lift up blacks. As has already been observed, that by itself was disgusting to very many in the army. This attitude was reflected by Major Hitchcock’s comrades’ opinions of Rufus Saxton also. Hitchcock recorded that “many of [them]—justly or unjustly—think or say they think [Saxton] took up the ‘nigger business’ in order to get advancement,” and he noted Sherman’s “dislike to theorists and ‘abolitionists,’ etc.”¹⁹⁰

Obviously that opinion was not shared by French’s fellow Gideonites, who of course were the very theorists and abolitionists that Sherman disdained. But many of them, like Hitchcock, were soured by an impression of self-righteous conceit that French communicated by his demeanor, face, tone of voice, and word choice. No one in the evangelical orbit, whether Northerners or Southern blacks, seemed put off by this, but it rubbed many (though not all) outside that sphere the wrong way. A large part of this is

¹⁸⁹ Henry Hitchcock, *Marching with Sherman: Passages from the Letters and Campaign Diaries of Henry Hitchcock, Major and Assistant Adjutant General of Volunteers, November 1864–May 1865*, M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1927), 227-28.

¹⁹⁰ Hitchcock, *Marching with Sherman*, 226.

probably because French could hardly say anything without making biblical comparisons and allusions. To many this must have seemed phony and put-on, like he was crudely showing off his Sunday morning sermonic ability all the time. In reality, however, this was truly how his mind worked. After 1843 in Circleville it had become almost impossible for French to discourse with anyone about anything except the most mundane business matters without alluding to the Bible. Not all evangelicals talked this way, of course—French himself did not in his Episcopalian years—but evangelicals understood it. Non-evangelicals did not. Similarly, French compulsively studded his conversation with evangelical jargon like the exclamation “amen!” and the form of address “brother” regardless of where he was and with whom. This odd lingo startled non-evangelicals and provided them plenty of material for mocking entertainment behind French’s back.¹⁹¹

French’s aura of righteous self-importance blended with an unseemly gravitation to persons in power. His behavior toward such figures as Salmon P. Chase, Rufus Saxton, Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew, and many others—including William T. Sherman, whom it repelled—must have seemed sycophantic to his skeptics. It infuriated them all the more when it succeeded by vaulting French into his own position of influence such as serving as Saxton’s “Aaronic” mouthpiece, as Hitchcock termed it.

There was a certain degree of innocence on French’s part in this. From his viewpoint, every worldly leader, especially those who demonstrated principles concordant with Universal Freedom, was a potential deliverer of the oppressed. Each who proved worthy French idealized, often openly, as a second Moses, David, Cyrus, or

¹⁹¹ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 216-17.

Zerubbabel in keeping with his biblical-typological worldview. French had a certain weakness for hero-worship as well. These themes were evident as early as his Romantic contemplation of Lajos Kossuth in 1852. In one of the drafts of French's missive to the Hungarian, he wrote,

Others may hail you as a *Patriot*, a *Hero*, a *Statesman*, but let my heart, dear Sir, salute you in Christ Jesus our Lord. I love you. Around my fireside for years, I have read and conversed about you. While before the sacred altar of prayer, I have praised God for the gift of such a man to the families of earth, and I have prayed Him to give you the spirit of *Universal Brotherhood*. . . .

In dreams of the night thou wast brought, all weary and laid in my arms. I placed my hand on thy poor bleeding heart, I bathed thy *burning temples* with *tears* of *sympathy*. I breathed in thy ear, *thoughts* of *love*. Thou wast refreshed with repose, and now that thou art gone forth to thy work, my heart shall still, *beat & speak & pray* for thee.¹⁹²

Those who admire French might hope that much of this did not end up in the letter's final version.

Even so, ambition was by no means totally absent from French's motives when he fawned over powerful men, at least not after he went to work at Port Royal. French possessed a keen awareness of how the mighty could actualize the success of a worthy cause, and his zeal drove him to use every lever he could in the service of Universal Freedom, including cozy access to the powerful that increased his own power and raised his profile. To achieve his goals French assumed whatever authority he could. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the commander of the 1st South Carolina, loathed French from the start and described him as "the high priest of the department, tall, erect, autocratic, evangelical, determined, unscrupulous. There has never yet been a General in this

¹⁹² M. French to Louis Kossuth, February 10, 1852, FFP.

department whom he could not wind round his finger.”¹⁹³ An example of French’s method is found in a report he wrote in 1865, intended for publication, of how he obtained Stanton’s authorization to Saxton to enlist, organize, and deploy black troops in 1862. French addressed the account to Saxton and forwarded it to Stanton, and in it he obsequiously extolled both men, yet the hero of the story is transparently himself.¹⁹⁴

French vexed Higginson directly when he presented Higginson’s regiment with its colors at the January 1, 1863 celebration. The colonel was startled and irritated because French got the flags without his knowledge and because Higginson misunderstood French to be passing himself off as the 1st South Carolina’s chaplain “every where North.” Higginson was even more piqued that French got his own name engraved on the flagstaff in letters larger than the regiment’s. Notwithstanding Higginson’s peevishness, there is no doubt that French was quite a showman dating from as far back as the protracted meetings at which he electrified crowds in Ohio in the 1840s and ’50s. His canny ability to attract public attention already proved to be a major asset for the Port Royal work and for the destiny of the freedpeople in general. However, there is a fine line between promotion and self-promotion, and French’s blurry track along it repelled many Gideonites.¹⁹⁵

Higginson also accused French of using his access to the powerful to sully the

¹⁹³ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 216-17. The dislike may have been mutual. French entertained letters from correspondents who criticized Higginson as unfit for command after an embarrassing operation at Jacksonville, Florida. And of the many firsthand accounts of the January 1 Emancipation Proclamation celebration, French’s is the only one not to mention Higginson’s eloquent speech. See C. L. Robinson to M. French, April 3, 1863, FFP; Lyman D. Stickney to M. French, April 22, 1863, FFP; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:352.

¹⁹⁴ Mansfield French to Edwin M. Stanton, October 24, 1865; W-2260; 1865; M619, roll 0442.

¹⁹⁵ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 74, 81; see pp. 309-10 above.

names of those who got in his way; he believed that the chaplain was not above “telling lies against any saint of any sect now going.” Allegations of French’s deceit and slander abound among the writings of his enemies, who nicknamed him “Mendax” (Latin for “liar”). Intriguingly, however, none of them recorded any actual examples of French’s duplicity that we possess. Nevertheless, although there is no evidence of bald untruths, there are examples of French selectively revealing some information and withholding the rest in order to achieve his objectives, as will be seen in the next section. And as has been seen repeatedly already, French shamelessly criticized people to their superiors behind their backs if they obstructed what he thought was best for the blacks, and he typically questioned their motives as well.¹⁹⁶

Besides what French was rumored to do in secret, his public activity was equally exasperating to his despisers. To them, French displayed a marked propensity to neglect his business—namely, to supervise educational and religious aspects of the mission and technically to visit soldiers in the hospital—to meddle in matters that did not belong to him. Some saw this trait in French’s zeal to normalize blacks’ marital relationships, which none quite objected to as wrong per se, but which some seemed to regard as beside the point of the mission and a hassle to missionaries with real work to do. Superintendent Thomas D. Howard saw French as an interloper who had nothing to do with the Gideonites’ and Saxton’s three-fold mission of humanitarian relief, education, and cotton-planting, adding that “with his rotund form, oily address, and assumption of authority his daguerreotype would furnish a good illustration for one of Dickens’ Pecksniffs,” some of

¹⁹⁶ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journals*, 217; Allen, “Diary,” February 13, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers; see pp. 244, 255-56, 302, 305-6, 323-24 above.

literature's greatest hypocrites. Howard's derision did not arise merely from Unitarian haughtiness; Howard's first coworker on the islands was a New York Methodist with whom he got along quite well. French may indeed have gotten so consumed with freedpeople's marriages, political intrigue, and publicity tours that he had little time for anything else. At Saxton's request, the National Freedman's Relief Association sent to the islands a "Superintendent of Education for our Association"—substantially French's job, and French remained jealous of the title. Even Chase confronted French about his "officiousness," for which French thanked him. Unfortunately for Chase, his advice failed to stop the minister from urging upon the secretary—repeatedly—his duty to become a member of a church to set a good example to others.¹⁹⁷

The fairest criticism was penned by Philadelphian Reuben Tomlinson, who believed that French had good intentions despite how the latter's "Methodistical . . . matter and manner" rubbed him the wrong way. Nevertheless, Tomlinson judged,

To speak without reserve I think from all that I can see, that Mr French does quite as much harm as he does good. He is in the receipt of twelve hundred dollars a year, as Chaplain to the Hospital here, and I am assured that he has not visited it much more than a half-dozen times, since his appointment. I am able to see for myself, that his tendency is constantly to run off somewhere, when his proper place is here. I believe entirely that he is a well-meaning man, but utterly wanting in judgement, and has a very full & perfect idea of his own importance. Such a man must in the long run do discredit to any cause, in which singleness of purpose & practical common sense are required.¹⁹⁸

French's "purpose" assuredly was "single" even if Tomlinson could not yet

¹⁹⁷ See pp. 275-76; Elizabeth A. Andrews, *Charles Howard Family Domestic History* (Cambridge, MA: n.p., 1956), 90, 106; Francis George Shaw to M. French, September 29, 1863, FFP; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, January 20, 1858, SPC; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, March 8, 1861, SPC; M. French to Salmon P. Chase, October 2, 1863, FFP; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:640.

¹⁹⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 179; Reuben Tomlinson to James Miller McKim, Aug. 18, 1862, May Anti-Slavery Collection.

perceive how French's disparate initiatives wove together in an integrated program of black uplift. Regardless, here yet again is the charge of impracticality that was raised against French from the very beginning of the Port Royal mission.¹⁹⁹ Given that he had copious experience running academies as proprietor or principal since 1831 and had guided the magazine he owned from near-collapse to prosperity and acclaim over six years, French hardly seems to have been a man lacking in "practical common sense." What then did this perception stem from? To Edward Philbrick, French's program for helping the blacks, at sharp variance with capitalist dogma, may have made the man himself appear impractical. Quite possibly French's uninhibited expressions of confidence that God would deliver the blacks gave non-evangelicals the false impression that he was unprepared to commit his own effort to seeing the deed done or that he was hopelessly naive about how to make it so.

Yet perhaps French's manner of handling business was more fly-by-night than his pre-Port Royal résumé made apparent, especially now that he was responsible for a host of subordinates and the management of concerns beyond the span of a single household or building. In truth, French did seem to have a tendency toward freewheeling financial management dating from his college agency days. French's letters from those periods, especially during the Wilberforce years, are pocked with a bewildering array of references to notes of his debts, notes of others' debts to him, notes for the college by donors, little loans Austa was supposed to get back home to tide her over, huge sums that belonged to the college that at times seem to have been covered by non-donors on

¹⁹⁹ See pp. 233, 243-44.

French's behalf in lieu of the actual money, and even stock that French owned in a California gold mining outfit despite his cash-poverty. Granted, the record is very incomplete, and much of this behavior was a function of the chaotic monetary "system" of that era. Nevertheless, one gets the impression that French was improvising as he went along, which probably contributed considerably to the acute stress he suffered under at those times. As an agent his travel expenses came out of the donations he acquired, as did his commission, and he drew both while he was on the road. As all the money—cash and IOUs—went into one pot, out of which French both paid himself and owed a sum to the college, the situation was ripe for sketchy money management.²⁰⁰

This had never exposed French to censure before; fellow evangelicals seemed to know and trust his motives without question, which overrode whatever conclusion they might otherwise have drawn from his actions. In fact, no evangelical ever complained about French's financial dealings until much later, and then only on the basis of hearsay. However, this trust lulled French into complacency that later excited considerable antagonism against him, because to many non-evangelicals French's carelessness in handling money suggested deliberate profit-seeking and self-dealing. To make matters worse, French seems to have been stunningly thoughtless of what strangers, especially those not attracted by his preaching, might think about what he was doing—what, in Henry Hitchcock's words, "looks bad." Unfortunately for French, people who were entirely turned off by him assumed (and murmured) the worst. Besides Hitchcock's example of wedding fees—which French insisted that he never took more than twice,

²⁰⁰ See letters from M. French especially to A. French, 1857-59, FFP; pp. 154-55, 184-85 above. French owned stock in the Sonora Mining Company.

even when offered—a Northern teacher mentioned that French “got possession of the New Bedford contributions and never accounted for them.” Whatever that episode was, it fits a pattern of sloppy business dealings that generated a torrent of denunciation against French after the war. This issue will be examined further in later sections.²⁰¹

Although Hitchcock did not mention it, French’s reputation was significantly damaged by his association with missionaries who did cheat donors and freedpeople and attempted to skirt army regulations for profit. As we have seen, from the beginning of the mission the Boston contingent thought little of the quality of the missionaries sent from New York, of whom French was chief, and they were too often correct in their assessment. Fairly or not, they identified corrupt Gideonites—at least, corrupt as the Bostonians saw them—as belonging to “the French set . . . of false missionaries.” These included a minister named Phillips, who while a plantation superintendent also served St. Helena’s Baptist church as the pastor for free. Phillips galled some missionaries and perhaps some of his congregation by asking for a substantial salary to remain there after his superintendency came to an end. They also included a Mr. Root, who was “convicted of lying and stealing,” and a minister sent by the American Missionary Association named McCrea, who was convicted of selling whiskey to a soldier. Both were expelled from the department.²⁰²

Then there was the case of a Reverend Hyde, another minister who had been recruited by the AMA. Hyde left seven dependents back home to labor at Port Royal on

²⁰¹ M. E. Strieby to E. P. Smith, November 20, 1866, AMA 90426; clipping (3F31-005), FFP; Allen, “Diary,” January 10, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers; see pp. 351-52, 363-64, 457-78 below.

²⁰² Allen, “Diary,” February 13, 1864, March 27, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers; Simeon S. Jocelyn to M. French, August 15, 1863, FFP.

the naive assumption that since Gideon's Band was doing such a service for the government, the government would surely step in and pay them handsome salaries. Although the government did soon employ plantation superintendents, including Hyde, the modest wage that was suitable to single and childless men did not meet his standard. So Hyde began supplementing his salary by dealing fraudulently with the freedpeople under his care, such as by watering down the wholesale molasses that he was given to resell at cost to his workers. The second time that Hyde was caught he was given a free ticket to New York and told in clear terms that he was expected to use it. But Hyde did not leave. Instead, representing his termination as having been caused by his plantation's conversion into Camp Saxton, Hyde asked the AMA to commission him as a professional missionary among the freedpeople. The association's interest quickly cooled when Hyde made bold salary demands. Undaunted—and apparently strongly averse to going home—Hyde found ministry opportunities on the islands for himself and submissively asked the AMA for a commission at its standard pay scale. That was when French got involved, suggesting to Hyde to ask the AMA to station him on Hilton Head Island, where French believed that freedpeople especially needed ministerial attention. When Hyde reached the island he encountered its general superintendent, the aforementioned Thomas D. Howard. Howard knew of Hyde's dismissal and contacted Saxton's supervisor of plantation operations Edward Hooper, who forced Hyde to leave the department since he had no authorized assignment.²⁰³

²⁰³ H. Hyde to unknown, June 3, 1862, AMA H5144; H. Hyde to George Whipple, November 12, 1862, AMA H5157; H. Hyde to Simeon S. Jocelyn, December 12, 1862, AMA H5162; H. Hyde to George Whipple, Dec. 26, 1862, AMA H5164; H. Hyde to George Whipple, March 6, 1863, AMA H5190; Andrews, *Charles Howard Family*, 105-7.

Howard concluded that by sending Hyde to Hilton Head instead of to New York, French deliberately circumvented headquarters, where French and Hooper—who considered French his “pet aversion”—battled for influence in the department. French, on the other hand, did not understand Hyde’s dismissal from the post of plantation superintendent to be dismissal from the department and tried to see the man appointed to an area of need by a missions board, which would justify his stay on the islands. French must have known about the allegations against Hyde, and it seems strange that he would have had any desire to associate with a reputed swindler and see him appointed a missionary. He may have believed that the charges were actually grounded in Unitarian jealousy and not in fact. In any case, Gideonites interpreted the affair according to their prejudices, which made it one more reason for French’s adversaries to consider him as corrupt as every other evangelical minister from New York. The scandal even compelled Rufus Saxton, who never doubted French’s integrity, to make a rule in November 1863 that prohibited ministers from serving as plantation superintendents and separated religious instruction from general education in the department.²⁰⁴

If associates like these were not enough to put French in a bad light, his wife’s cloying eccentricity at the beginning of the expedition tarnished his reputation even more. Years afterward, the tale of Austa’s landfall was still being told with malicious glee. On a boat ride with friends in 1864 missionary Arthur Sumner openly voiced his belief that Mansfield French was “‘a liar, scoundrel, thief, and hypocrite’—all of which is well known here to be perfectly true.” Then a companion regaled him again with the story of

²⁰⁴ Allen, “Diary,” January 10, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers; Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 211; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 182.

Austa's embrace of a black stranger, which prompted Sumner loudly to pronounce her "cracked." Sumner was suddenly mortified, however, to hear the voice of the Frenches' son Winchell, Sumner's friendly acquaintance, sternly rebuking him from behind; it rather ruined the missionary's day.²⁰⁵

Do these manifold broadsides against French add up to a valid assessment of the man? Was he really that bad? French's tight relationships with his superiors complicate getting to the truth about his actions. In 1866 a host of high-ranking officers and Secretary Chase publicly vouched for his character in the loftiest terms in the *New York Times*. There were "abundant reasons for the belief that he was always actuated by honest motives," said one. "He is a wise and good man, whose influence and labors . . . help[ed] to advance our sacred cause, and impress a noble humanity upon our arms," said another. A third "never knew a man so faithful, so zealous, so scrupulously honest in all he said and did." Chase testified that he knew French for years to be "an active, earnest, faithful Christian minister," who "performed [his] duty to my entire satisfaction. . . . I never doubted either his fidelity or his disinterestedness." Some of these superiors admitted that they had to investigate charges brought against French by his enemies all too frequently but that upon inspection they never found a single instance of wrongdoing on his part. If anything, they found unscrupulous activity by others that French attempted to interrupt, sometimes unwisely but always innocently. However, these authorities' endorsements raise a problem of their own, because exoneration by friends in high places was exactly what French's accusers expected. They believed that his ability to curry favor and

²⁰⁵ See p. 233; Arthur Sumner to Nina Hartshorn, August 8, 1864, Arthur Sumner Manuscripts, Folder 3615, Penn School Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

hoodwink superiors knew no bounds and that therefore he would never be caught. An evaluation of French's integrity therefore rests heavily on how crafty one believes French could be and how easily duped Chase, Hunter, Saxton, and the string of authorities that followed them could be.²⁰⁶

Saxton's case is illustrative. The general was almost universally beloved by the idealists at Port Royal of every religious persuasion not to mentioned idolized by the freedpeople. This put people like Thomas Wentworth Higginson in a terrible conundrum as they groped to explain how a leader they esteemed so highly could be intimate with a man they despised so intensely. Higginson's solution was that Saxton's goodness made him stupid. "Perhaps soldiers are ill trained for judging character . . .," he pondered. "Gen. Saxton is absorbed in his great aims & hopes & too simple minded to believe in the possibility of such mixed motives as rule the minds of those around him. *A more stainless integrity I never met with.*" Higginson concluded that "if [Saxton] appoints a man, he trusts him wholly, & lets him manage his own department, almost unwatched."²⁰⁷

This is patently false. Whatever Saxton's management style, even Higginson admitted that when Saxton did discover misbehavior in his command, he dismissed the wrongdoer "without mercy." Saxton was one of French's superiors who was forced to investigate accusations against him many times, and he testified that "*in every instance I found upon a careful investigation that they were false and malicious in every particular*" (emphasis original). To Higginson's point, however, it should be noted that when Saxton

²⁰⁶ "Chaplain Mansfield French," *New York Times*, January 29, 1867; "Georgia," *New York Times*, June 30, 1866.

²⁰⁷ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 81.

was asked by an 1866 Congressional committee what evidence Saxton had against an accused financier of wartime blockade-running, he answered that French claimed possession of documentary proof. “Was that a truthful man who gave you this information?” Saxton was asked. “I believe him to be so,” the general deadpanned; “he was a minister.”²⁰⁸

With respect to malfeasance, the judgment of this author is that French was neither wily enough nor were all his superiors credulous enough for him to get away with what he was accused of on the scale he was accused of, as will be examined in more detail later. However, other charges against French—that he cozied up to authority figures by flattery, manipulated them mendaciously, arrogated authority self-importantly, meddled in others’ affairs, and abandoned his own—are much more difficult to dismiss. In truth, he did all these things, although it is likely that his behavior fell into a gray area between ignorance and intentionality. He probably knew well that praise opens doors to people in power, but he praised them for what he believed or hoped to be true of them, leavened with the old-fashioned courtesy that well-mannered people showed to authorities. He sometimes inflated his own importance, but that may have had more to do with self-delusion than deceit. He took shrewd care to present information in the most persuasive way possible, but his zeal may have blinded even himself to inconvenient facts.

Moreover, any powerful personality like Mansfield French’s is like a magnet—the

²⁰⁸ Looby, *Complete Civil War Journal*, 81; “Chaplain Mansfield French,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1867; W. P. Fessenden, et al., *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, The Black Heritage Library Collection (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 2:216.

stronger it attracts some, the stronger it repels others. His strengths were his weaknesses: no man with the gumption to launch the Port Royal Experiment, legalize blacks' marriages on a massive scale (which, it should be remembered, was as important to most of them as it was to him), and win the first authorization to enlist black troops could help being (and being seen as) a busybody. Imagine the consequences if French had done as Reuben Tomlinson wished and kept narrowly focused on his official duties.

Furthermore, from the beginning of the mission one gets the sense that French's greatest crime was being an evangelical, and a Methodist at that; again, what attracted the freedman repulsed the Unitarian and the profane. Why did evangelicals so rarely even hint that French's conduct was not quite right, much less speak against him with such vituperation? The only similar allegation made against French prior to going South was when the North Ohio Conference examined him for staying home to recuperate from illness and then freelancing instead of going to ride the Mount Gilead circuit as he was ordered. That might be interpreted as an example of dereliction of duty, but in any case the conference exonerated him.²⁰⁹ However, it might rightly be pointed out that we possess much material about what others privately thought of French during his Port Royal period and virtually none from any time before or after. Perhaps these concerns had been murmured against him his whole life but it took the high-pressure cocktail of government, war, and interdenominational discord to bring them out (and later to be unearthed by Willie Lee Rose's scholarship).

The assumption of almost everyone who knew French in 1863 and later was that

²⁰⁹ See pp. 160-63.

his actions and his motives were inextricably related—that is, if French did something wrong, it was because he was a fraud. (As it happened, French held a similar point of view, believing that if someone disagreed with his prescription for the freedpeople’s welfare then that person was inhumane.) Yet French’s contemporaries rarely criticized his most significant moral blemish: his implicit belief that the end justifies the means.

French’s defenders knew that his critics were dead wrong when they alleged that French was insincere and in the mission for himself. French’s supporters knew that he was obsessed with racial equality and that it drove everything he did. What his defenders failed to see was how this obsession obscured other moral and ethical considerations from his view. At the conclusion of this chapter we will revisit this issue along with the question, “Did public service bring out the best, the worst, or both in Mansfield French?”

Preemption: The Second Battle for Land

In 1863 an abolitionist wrote in Methodist weekly *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* of the questions gnawing at Northerners’ minds when emancipation became government policy: “Will these colored men *enlist* and *fight*? Will they *work*? Can they be *educated*? Will they be *provident*? Can they be elevated in *social position* to respectable citizens?” To get answers to these questions, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton commissioned a trio designated the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, consisting of long-time antislavery advocates Samuel Gridley Howe, James McKaye, and Robert Dale Owen, to tour the Union-occupied South. It was natural that they would do considerable investigation into affairs at Port Royal, where, as *Zion’s Herald* proclaimed,

these questions were “now being settled in this momentous experiment.”²¹⁰

These questions about whether blacks would help white society and the Union cause were indeed settled squarely in the affirmative in the minds of Rufus Saxton and Gideon’s Band. The questions that lingered in their minds were about the long-term welfare of blacks themselves, questions that few others were asking. What were the economic principles inherent in freedom? What was the economic basis required for blacks to live in freedom? Were the Northern people willing either to bear its cost or to impose it on rebels?

When James McKaye arrived at Beaufort in June 1863 to view the experiment’s progress and to interview participants, white and black, French was on two months’ leave in New York to visit Austa while she was convalescing, to produce an issue or two of the *Beauty of Holiness*, and to promote the needs of the freedpeople among New York’s evangelicals, so the commission did not hear his testimony.²¹¹ Yet in talking to freedpeople McKaye found that their “chief ambition . . . is to own property, especially to possess land, if it be only a few acres, in their own State,” and he asked tax commissioner Abram D. Smith about how this might come to pass. In the course of the interview Smith outlined two programs with contradictory details. The first plan was

that every man capable of buying a farm should have opportunity to purchase from five to fifteen or five hundred acres. I would not *give* a single cent’s worth, because these people must be taught to pay for all that they get. My plan is to sell

²¹⁰ L. D. Barrows, “The Freedmen of the South,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 4, 1863, 174; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 181-88.

²¹¹ George Lansing Taylor to M. French, May 27, 1863, FFP; M. J. French to W. French, June 6, 1863, FFP; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, June 9, 1863, SPC. French did not escape excitement during this furlough; the *Beauty’s* office, in the same building as the progressive, evangelical New York *Independent*, was almost burned down by a mob in the violent draft riot in July. See M. French to A. French, July 14, 1863, FFP.

to these people and to white men also. I want to have the exemplar of white enterprise before the colored people.

Since this would leave the majority of the freedpeople without their own land working as wage laborers for whites, Smith believed that the government ought to establish firm labor laws (such as setting a maximum work week and prohibiting corporal punishment) to prevent owners from exploiting and abusing their employees.²¹²

But later in the interview Smith advised that the government's ideal next step was to offer its lands for sale in January 1864 "at \$1 or \$1.25 per acre and give the right of preemption to be perfected in October, letting the negro file his right of preemption" at the rate of about five acres per individual (and thus more per household). In other words, black families would have permission to stake a claim to a plot of ground and move onto it by October 1863 and purchase it well below market rate, thereby exempting it from auction in January.²¹³

Smith's first plan would result in farms of widely varying size in racially mixed neighborhoods. In general, white farmers would own large farms of hundreds of acres worked by black employees while a small fraction of the resident blacks—those who had demonstrated their worthiness by their thrift—would own tiny farms of five to fifteen acres that they worked themselves. By contrast, Smith's second plan would result in near-exclusive black ownership of the Sea Islands on family-based farms of twenty to forty acres; most of the freedpeople would get a stake in the land. Why Smith floated both proposals in the same interview, seemingly unconcerned about their disharmony, is

²¹² *War of the Rebellion*, III, 3:437; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 229-30.

²¹³ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 232.

uncertain. What is certain is that Smith managed to articulate the two visions of the Sea Islands' future that would dominate islanders' attention for the next ten months with an echo that would reverberate far longer.

The second vision that Smith related had been circulating among abolitionists from the beginning of the war. From a belief that democracy was founded on widespread landownership combined with hostility toward the Southern aristocracy that brought on secession, some abolitionists hoped that the Civil War would form a pretext for dispossessing planters and redistributing their property to landless whites and blacks alike. By 1863 demands for the government to take action in this way became more insistent. Mansfield French agreed, but for him the prospect of land grants to former slaves was less about sweeping wealth redistribution and more a matter of simple justice. "[T]he negroes had made [the land] what it was," he was reported as saying, but rather than receiving the fruits of their labor, they had been recompensed with the lash and family breakups instead. As the only ones who had actually worked the land and made it productive, "it belonged to them, and them only." In French's mind there was no need for blacks to work diligently under white management in order to earn land, because in fact they had been earning it for more than a century. It was high time they were paid their wages. For the government to convey the land to anyone else was to steal it from its rightful owners.²¹⁴

The first plan that Smith proposed seems to have originated with his fellow commissioner William Henry Brisbane and was supported by their other colleague,

²¹⁴ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 246-49; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 15.

William E. Wording. Brisbane's first interest, unlike Smith's, appears to have been simply to do his job to execute the direct tax law. Yet upon returning to his native soil, Brisbane began to muse about its ideal outcome as many others at Port Royal had been doing. Brisbane found the law as written and the likely consequences of the tax sales much to his liking. He believed that large farms held by Northern investors would raise the value of the freedpeople's tiny farms, yielding a substantial return on investment for the minority of blacks who would buy land at market rate. The large operations would also provide greater stability for the whole Sea Island economy; this would benefit freedpeople who would otherwise face uncertain prospects raising a risky crop (cotton) with little capital and savings. Brisbane had no doubt that black purchasers would indeed acquire land at tax sales. Some had done so in the first round by pooling their resources, and as more blacks enlisted in the army, they were entitled to an advantageous installment plan for purchase allowed for veterans.²¹⁵

There were also other reasons that various interested third parties wanted the government to avoid circumventing the market and endowing the freedpeople with land. First, to fund the war the government needed as much money as it could get, which auction sales could provide and below-market conveyance would not. Second, although it was widely assumed that freedmen would plant cotton on their own, what if they did not? Many blacks despised cotton because of its close association with slavery, and many were less interested in cash than in their families' full stomachs. If blacks replaced the Sea Islands' cotton fields with edible crops on a large scale, it would only exacerbate the

²¹⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 223-25.

thirst of New England textile mills already desperate for more cotton. Third, it made many Americans profoundly uneasy for the government to seize property from wealthy producers and redistribute it among the poor on a large scale. A powerful national government overwhelming the sovereignty of a property owner was a precedent that many wanted to avoid at all costs. What if the principle was subsequently applied in the North?²¹⁶

It took French and Saxton, who had his eye on land redistribution since at least February 1862, little time after the first tax auction in March 1863 to see that the rest of the confiscated lands hung in the balance between these two visions. They were determined to see theirs prevail. French quickly concluded that Brisbane and Wording could not be persuaded, and he thus considered them obstacles; there is no evidence that French ever consulted with the men in order to come to a constructive solution. Smith was a different story, however. His testimony in June suggests that he was caught between the influence of his fellow commissioners on the one side and Saxton and French on the other, but by the autumn he had been drawn securely into the latter camp.

These three had another important ally, James Thompson, the editor of a new newspaper in Beaufort, the *Free South*. French had a large hand in establishing the paper hoping that it would be sustained by abolitionist subscribers in the North. True to form, French elicited from Salmon P. Chase vague openness to using government revenue from the cotton harvest to supplement private donations to launch the newspaper; he told the fund's manager Hiram Barney that Chase had thereby ordered Barney to bankroll the

²¹⁶ Levine, *Fall of the House*, 211.

paper; he further assured Barney that Saxton would approve the requisition from the cotton fund; and he left Barney with the impression (without actually promising) that if Saxton did not come through then French would be personally responsible to reimburse the government for the outlay. As it turned out, Chase claimed that French misrepresented him, Saxton did not approve the expenditure, and French—who denied misleading anyone and blamed Chase for the cock-up—scrambled for donors and lenders to pay Barney back while disavowing any obligation to do so. Indeed, the whole ownership structure seems to have been shady—one early supporter claimed that his name appeared on the paper as a “proprietor” without his approval and later asked to sever all connection with it. Even French’s son Winchell somehow profited from the sale of the newspaper’s press and type, lost his job under Barney at the U.S. Customs House in New York because of it, and forced Saxton to disassociate himself from the enterprise. This was the sort of messy affair that led skeptics to call French a fraud and a cheat, and interestingly it took Edward L. Pierce, who was back on the islands on a job for the Treasury Department, to step in as mediator and sort out the mess. In the meantime, however, French’s young friend and supporter Thompson became the most widely heard voice on the Sea Islands and used the *Free South* to exercise a mighty influence on public opinion among Northern humanitarians there.²¹⁷

The party of Saxton, French, Smith, and Thompson made the first move when

²¹⁷ Looby, *Complete Civil War Diary*, 81; M. French to M. J. French, December 4, 1862, FFP; “The Free South,” *The Liberator*, January 23, 1863, 14; Charles C. Leigh to M. French, January 29, 1863, FFP; Charles C. Leigh to M. French, February 6, 1863, FFP; Lyman D. Stickney to M. French, July 5, 1863, FFP; Edward L. Pierce to Hiram Barney, September 7, 1863, FFP; Lyman D. Stickney to M. French, September 13, 1863, FFP; Salmon P. Chase to M. French, September 16, 1864, FFP; M. French to W. French, February 16, 1863, FFP.

French wrote to Chase on August 22, 1863 to propose a variation on the second plan that Smith had outlined to James McKaye in June. French informed Secretary Chase that many freedmen were storing up small amounts of money from their summer work, and others would get still more when they sold their excess privately grown food crops at harvest time. French suggested that the land be divided “into tracts of 20, 30, & 40 acres, and sold at, say \$1,25 to \$1,50 per acre,” which would enable “very many, if not most, of the families” to purchase a permanent homestead. Otherwise, not only would the freedpeople still not have means to purchase a home for at least a whole year, but French was worried that they would burn through their money from the harvest in a “demoralizing” way—probably meaning whiskey and perhaps other frivolous luxuries. “[P]ermanent homes,” French concluded, are “the only means, of subserving the social, intellectual & spiritual interests of this, yet to be, under God, mighty people.” As the tax commissioners’ boss, the ball was now in Chase’s court.²¹⁸

Chase did not delay but took the matter to the president. On September 16 Lincoln issued new orders to the tax commissioners about government-held lands in South Carolina. With characteristic adroitness Lincoln’s new plan combined the interests of both sides into a neat compromise. About half of the land was to be auctioned off on the open market at upcoming sales. The rest, which the president specifically designated by plantation name, was to be held out of the auction. Twenty of the plantations were reserved for continued military use; thirty-five were to be leased to Northern planters employing black laborers, the proceeds of the lease to fund schools for the blacks; and

²¹⁸ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 4:113-14.

fifty-five plantations were to be divided into twenty-acre lots and reserved for sale to black heads of households at the bargain price of \$1.25 per acre. The president selected the reserved plantations to approximate a checkerboard alternation with those to be put up for auction, each “square” being about 160 acres in area.²¹⁹

Brisbane and Wording were satisfied executing the new orders of the chief, but French was not the sort of man who saw beauty in compromise, and in this case neither was Saxton. From the secret counsels of these men and Abram D. Smith emerged a bold plan to defy Lincoln’s instructions. The conspirators meant to urge the freedpeople to stake claims not only to the lands reserved to them but also to those to be put up for auction. They expected that when the sale arrived, potential buyers would be intimidated by the black preemptors and would lack the will to evict and therefore opt not to bid, leaving the lands to the squatters. Within the local community of Northerners, James Thompson was to serve as the prophet for this scheme. Thus in the November 3 issue of the *Free South* Saxton announced his instructions to the freedmen who wished to claim land. Each claimant was to deposit their money with a description of the plot that they wanted at his headquarters and were encouraged to move onto it immediately, build a cabin, and start working on it. Saxton’s aide-de-camp Edward Hooper would bid for the plots on their behalf at the coming auction. A couple weeks later the new commander of the Department of the South, Quincy A. Gillmore, ordered the tax sales to be postponed, presumably to allow the freedpeople more time to stake their claims. Saxton assured the freedmen that it is “highly probable that no person would feel disposed to interfere with”

²¹⁹ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 277; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 219-20.

the squatter's preemptive claim to the land and outbid the claimant.²²⁰

Why were Saxton, French, Smith, and Thompson so confident that social pressure and legal custom would prevent investors from outbidding freedmen? They probably noted similarities between Lincoln's order and the Preemption Act of 1841. Both involved federally owned land, both transferred ownership to a head of household, and in both the minimum price was \$1.25 per acre. Saxton's modification extended the congruence by positing a right of preemption to settlers who work the land, like the 1841 law. Yet there was a crucial difference between Saxton's order and the statute, and this the men ignored: the Preemption Act applied to undeveloped Western lands, not to premium lands already under cultivation. To Saxton and his comrades it was self-evident that slaves were the ones who had cleared and developed the Sea Islands and that this was their long-awaited reward, but their assumption that others would see it this way was highly dubious.²²¹

Around the same time that Saxton publicized his instructions for claiming land in print, he, French, and Smith began touring the islands to explain them to the largely illiterate freedpeople in person. A sympathetic witness described one scene,

where were gathered men and women who stood and sat in ranks of hundreds beneath the shadows of the beautiful pines, the fearful were made confident, and believers were confirmed. The day was the holy Sabbath; the place just outside a church, near the centre of Port Royal Island. . . . The services opened by singing "Children of a Heavenly King,/As we journey let us sing," &c. Prayer was then offered by the Rev. Mr. Hall, (colored), from New York, after which the Rev. Mr. French addressed the people from these words: "Behold the Lord thy God hath set

²²⁰ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 220-23; Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 149.

²²¹ The Preemption Act of 1841, 27th Congress, Ch. 16, 5 Stat. 453 (1841), <http://www.minnesotalegalhistoryproject.org/assets/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Preemption%20Act%20of%201841.pdf> (accessed November 24, 2014).

the land before thee; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged,” Deut. i. 21.

General Saxton, large hearted and courageous in all that appertains to the good of his people, explained clearly to them the importance of their owning permanent homes. They were on trial now before themselves and the nation. He had full faith that they would succeed. . . .

The correspondent reported that the freedpeople, whose “desire for land” was “intense,” responded enthusiastically to the duo’s summons. “From all quarters young men, middle-aged, and the old man . . . are coming into town with their money. None bring less than \$25. Here comes from the ferry . . . an aged pilgrim . . . saying, ‘please count dat, massa, dat for me and my old woman. We thankful to have home and freedom, if only one day, before we die.’ ” In at least one case the entire slave corps on one plantation pooled enough money to buy their whole farm and work it collectively.²²²

This witness frankly admitted that Saxton and French’s plan diverged from the president’s; this was common knowledge. Some of Gideon’s Band were doubtful that the scheme would work. Yet they were won over by the excitement and robust industry that erupted from the freedpeople, which reinforced Gideonites’ increasing mistrust of Edward S. Philbrick’s enterprise and fear of seeing that model dominate the islands.

Philbrick, meanwhile, viewed events entirely differently. His own interests were secure and were not directly affected by the disposition of the rest of the government’s land. However, he was a critical observer who saw that Saxton, French, and Smith’s plan emerged from beliefs about securing the freedpeople’s welfare that directly contradicted

²²² *Report of the Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Concert Hall, Philadelphia, November 3rd, 1863, to Take into Consideration the Condition of the Freed People of the South* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1863), 20-24.

his own. He also detected an implicit rebuke to his own enterprise that was gaining traction among other Port Royalists and, worse, threatened to upset his workers. When French and Smith came to his neighborhood to explain the orders, Philbrick did not see eager joy but worried confusion. He took pity on his employees who anxiously asked him if they had to buy homesteads or else be evicted. Philbrick assured them that this was not the case. He doubted that many blacks would be interested in preemption, preferring the comfort and stability of meekly remaining employed by white planters.²²³

Philbrick was partly right and partly wrong. He astutely predicted that even if blacks who preempted succeeded in scaring away competition at the tax sales, that would not necessarily protect them when the 1861 plantation owners returned after the war to buy their real estate back from government hands. As to the blacks' liability to eviction if they did not settle on their own land, Philbrick knew that *he* would not evict the elderly and children living on his plantations, but he seems unconcerned about what other buyers might do when they took possession, which to French was the imminent danger. Finally, what most escaped Philbrick's awareness was that former slaves had been thoroughly conditioned to tell their masters what the masters wanted to hear, ever conscious that their performance of that skill could be a matter of life and death. Philbrick was oblivious that he was the new master and that if his employees were interested in absconding to set up for themselves elsewhere, he would be the last one to know.

Meanwhile, commissioners Brisbane and Wording were not about to take the preemptionists' subversion—and Smith's insubordination—lying down. On December

²²³ Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 148-49.

12, Brisbane wrote to his superior, Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph J. Lewis, to complain about the meetings with the freedpeople conducted by Smith and French, who as usual was taking the blame for Saxton's initiative, at least at first. With horror Brisbane reported hearing that the pair "got the negroes on S^t Helena Island, at their church, to adopt some very violent resolutions." Brisbane did not see this ending well for the freedpeople. "The true friend of the negro, it seems to me," he wrote, "ought to encourage white men to purchase plantations among them as protectors, teachers and employers; and their own homesteads, so generously allowed them by the Government, will thereby be greatly increased in value intrinsically." Brisbane saw the reserved lands as a gracious gift, not as hard-earned wages.²²⁴

Even more galling, Smith insisted to Brisbane that Smith, not Brisbane, was the chairman of the commission and refused to sign any document that called Brisbane such. In order to get anything done the exasperated Brisbane had to put Smith's name first on any public bulletin or legal document. Meanwhile "the Free South . . . does all it can to depreciate Judge Wording and myself and to exalt Judge Smith, whose squatter sovereignty and such like ideas suit the proprietors better, than our rigid adherence to the Law and to the interests of the Government."²²⁵

The *Free South* was acclaiming French as obstreperously as it exalted Smith. A correspondent for the Democratic-leaning *New York Herald* slammed French in its columns around that time, which provoked James Thompson to unleash a furious

²²⁴ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 276.

²²⁵ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 277.

rebuttal, most likely using talking points and information supplied by French, who almost certainly also saw that Thompson's defense was reprinted in New York's Methodist *Christian Advocate and Journal*. "With great tenacity of purpose, skill in using the means at his command, a spirit undaunted by opposition, and a personal character beyond reproach," Thompson declared, "[French] has stood in the van of those who had the cause of the oppressed at heart, a mark for every fool to fling at, and every knave to hate." Praising French for conceiving and organizing the educational mission to the blacks, "although others have reaped the glory," Thompson painted a heroic picture: "Fearing neither personal danger, fatigue, or the misrepresentation of enemies, his hand was ready to execute what his head had planned." Thompson concluded by listing the generals that eagerly attended to French's counsel, noting that "[h]is relations with the President and his cabinet are well known, and but few men in the country are capable of wielding a wider influence."²²⁶

Indeed, the preemptionists' plan was as dependent on French's well-known influence with the Lincoln administration as it was with the timidity of potential buyers at the tax sales. Brisbane had suggested to his superior, Commissioner of Internal Revenue Joseph Lewis, to take Brisbane's complaints to Secretary Chase in order to get Brisbane and Wording some relief from French and Smith. Unfortunately for Brisbane, French had the inside track with Chase and went to see him in person. French's goal was to get the administration to alter Lincoln's directive of September 16 to match Saxton's order opening the land to preemption. He succeeded; in January French returned to Port Royal

²²⁶ "Rev. M. French," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, December 31, 1863.

victoriously bearing “additional instructions” from Chase in Lincoln’s name. The document proclaimed that all land not reserved for government or educational purposes was available for preemption in twenty- or forty-acre tracts to “any loyal person” aged twenty-one years or older who was currently living in the department or who had been for six months since the Union occupation. The price remained \$1.25 per acre, of which fifty cents were due upon preemption and the rest at the receipt of the deed.²²⁷

When French arrived at Beaufort he showed the instructions to Saxton and Smith but managed to put off Brisbane and Wording’s repeated requests to see them until after the steamer that brought him had sailed. (French actually wanted to publish the instructions in the New York newspapers before they were received by the commission itself, but Chase resisted.) The two commissioners finally got to read their orders the following day; French’s resistance forced them to wait for days before another ship could carry their protest to Washington. On January 16, 1864, the day after the commissioners saw their new orders, the new instructions were released to the public. Saxton jubilantly decreed,

The superintendents and teachers in this department are hereby directed to give their entire attention . . . to assist the people . . . in locating, staking out their claims, and securing their title deeds under this order of the President, which, in its beneficent results, is to be second only to the proclamation of emancipation. I also recommend the people to lose no time in pre-empting their claims and in preparing their grounds for the coming harvest. The foundation of all national wealth and prosperity is in the soil. No people can be truly prosperous who neglect its cultivation.

Freedmen, you should plow deep, plant carefully and in season, cultivate diligently, and you will reap abundant harvests. First provide for an ample supply

²²⁷ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 7:98-99.

of corn and vegetables, then remember that cotton is the great staple here. I advise you to plant all you can of it. So profitable was its culture in the old days of slavery that your former masters said: "Cotton is king." It is expected that you will show in a free South that cotton is more of a king than ever.

Saxton did not wish it to be said in the North that free black farmers in any way obstructed the textile industry and dragged down the national economy. At the same time, Thompson trumpeted French's triumph: "His efforts to procure a just provision in the disposal of lands to Freedmen, have been crowned with success. Few men have a stronger claim upon the gratitude of the black man, despite the slurs of those who have no *real* sympathy with the cause."²²⁸

As in the fall, Saxton, French, Smith, and a swelling cadre of allies took the message to the people on plantations all over the islands. One meeting on St. Helena Island was particularly noteworthy, because in addition to urging the freedpeople to stake their claims posthaste to defend their land against both Northern capitalists and someday returning Confederates, one speaker took a shot at the low wages Philbrick was paying his employees—with Philbrick present. Even though Philbrick did not have an active role in the quarrel over preemption, he was coming to represent white exploitation in the minds of blacks and white humanitarians alike. His employee William Channing Gannett wrote home acerbically, "Did you know we had long ceased to be philanthropists or even Gideonites? We are nothing now but speculators, and the righteous rail against us." Philbrick continued to believe that "a much higher rate of pay than [his workers] have been receiving would tend to diminish the amount of industry rather than to stimulate it,

²²⁸ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 284; Salmon P. Chase to M. French, September 16, 1864, FFP; *War of the Rebellion*, III, 4:120; *The Free South*, January 16, 1864 (clipping in FFP).

by rendering it too easy for them to supply their simple wants.” He saw his workers beginning to grumble at the meeting stimulated by the preemptionists’ incendiary ideas, but he still had not “found a single man on any of my places who wants to risk buying land. They all say they had rather stay where they are and work for me.” Nevertheless, he took prudent action to raise his workers’ wages slightly and pay them in cash only rather than with cash plus food.²²⁹

Philbrick was certain (wrongly) that Chase would never have altered the September instructions had French told him the truth about matters at Port Royal. He was also sure that in the end the previous rules would prevail. Not surprisingly, James Thompson had a different point of view. He reported that at the meeting on St. Helena Saxton told the freedpeople that they were indebted not only to Lincoln and Chase but also

to Mr. French who has in bringing this matter to the attention of the authorities, added another to the long list of benefits which he has been the means of bringing to those who have hitherto had few friends in need. . . . The part Mr. French has taken in every movement for good since he came into this Department, is evidently known; and he, and those who have never lost confidence in him through good and through evil report, may well rejoice in the success of the measures, of which he has been the patient and courageous champion.²³⁰

The champion did not fail to give his patron Chase the credit. “Never have I seen joy burst in such floods upon all classes of people, as when your instruc[tions] were declared to the people,” he wrote the secretary. “Freedom was enjoyed, but without an intelligent appreciation of it, while all seemed to fully understand the value of a *home*.

²²⁹ Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 157-59, 163.

²³⁰ Allen, “Diary,” February 13, 1864, William F. Allen Family Papers; “A Meeting on St. Helena,” *The Free South*, January 23, 1864 (clipping in FFP).

The *Lord* gave you great wisdom, for the sake of his humble poor.” Assuring Chase of the instructions’ endorsement by generals Gillmore and Saxton and by “the *whole community*, except such as have been disappointed in getting large plantations for speculation,” French went on to compliment the role that Smith played in bringing about the new policy. Admitting “the delicacy of my own suggestings,” French proceeded from his “*love to the cause*” to propose another Northerner at Port Royal to replace Brisbane or Wording on the commission. That would grant the preemptionists a majority of commissioners and remove the last obstacle, French thought, to the preemption plan’s accomplishment.²³¹

As it happened, Brisbane was also at the meeting on St. Helena and left beside himself with anger. The day before, while awaiting the next steamship to carry the mail, he had fired off to his superior Lewis a searing critique of the new instructions and the actions taken by Saxton, French, and Smith. Like Philbrick, Brisbane was certain that French must have lied to Chase about conditions on the Sea Islands. It was bad enough that the government would only garner a quarter to an eighth of the revenue that it otherwise would have gotten out of its lands. Worse, Brisbane shrewdly noted, the new instructions allowed preemption by any loyal *individual* on the islands with a period of residency, not just heads of household, and *without regard to race*. French had effectively opened the door to every white missionary and teacher on the islands and each of their family members—but no newcomers—to stake their own claims and get rich at the government’s expense. Brisbane believed that not a quarter of the freedpeople would end

²³¹ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, January 22, 1864, SPC.

up with land after white *missionary* speculators had crowded them out. Brisbane's estimate of preemption by whites was highly inflated, but there were a few who were moving to take advantage of the situation. They included French and his sons, who were aiming to seize the opportunity that French created, although it is unknown if they followed through.²³²

Brisbane then compared the new instructions to the Revenue Act point by point and found that in multiple particulars the orders did not line up with the law. In Brisbane's opinion it would take another act of Congress to do what Lincoln had apparently commanded in December. Any conveyances made by preemption could not possibly withstand legal scrutiny and would inevitably be annulled, which would leave the freedpeople in the lurch. Saxton insisted that the responsibility for that fell on the president, but Brisbane and Wording held that they were appointed by Lincoln to look after the details that he could not. Brisbane's patience with Saxton was running out, but he was still inclined to see the general as the puppet of his unscrupulous associates—that is, Mansfield French and Abram Smith:

I have much personal regard for Gen. Saxton on account of his large heartedness & kindly disposition to a long oppressed race, and for his readiness to afford me every facility to carry on my work for the benefit of that people; but I have deeply lamented from the first that I saw he had some in his confidence and his counsels who have talent enough to insinuate themselves into his favor & *carry their* points by *seeming to follow* him.

Brisbane was certain that French had spread lies about his and Wording's motives that turned the innocent Saxton against them with a result that Saxton himself would never

²³² Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 283-85; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 230; M. French to A. French, January 14, 1864, FFP.

knowingly tolerate: “Thus have Mr French & his co-adjutors brought these poor ignorant people into a state of bewilderment that gives the best opportunity for speculators to take the advantage of them.”²³³

The bitterest pill of all for Brisbane was that French and Thompson had used the *Free South* to make him a pariah in the missionary community, painting him as the heartless tool of rapacious capitalists. For a planter who out of principle had manumitted his slaves and moved North at enormous personal cost, this was too much to bear:

[M]y life has shown that the negroes could have no truer friend than myself. . . . The same spirit which made me twenty six years ago sacrifice home property & friendships the Secretary knows me well enough to believe will develop itself through life. . . . But I cannot look on and see what I am now seeing here and not feel that both soldier & negro are to be sacrificed to a “zeal without knowledge” on the part of some, cupidity on the part of others, and though last not least to a meddling spirit which has from first to last been a hindrance to the successful operations of this Commission.²³⁴

While Brisbane and Wording sent missives to the Treasury Department pleading for help, preemption claims from eager freedpeople began flooding their office. Citing their inability to process them without legal clarification from Washington, the two commissioners voted down Smith and did nothing. Their opponents were furious and vented their spleen in the *Free South*. Saxton also protested to Edwin M. Stanton. Countering the charge that the new instructions violated the law, Saxton insisted that “Smith, the only lawyer on the Board, pronounces them legal and just, and has done everything in his power to have them carried out.”²³⁵

²³³ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 285-86.

²³⁴ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 287.

²³⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 229-30, *War of the Rebellion*, III, 4:119.

Meanwhile in Washington things started turning in Brisbane's favor. Increasingly disenchanted by the discord among the civilians in his command, General Gillmore wrote Chase that Saxton, French, and Smith's plan was a bad one and that the original instructions offered blacks the best protection against speculators. Moreover, the days on the commission of Saxton and French's key ally Judge Smith were numbered. Smith was well known to be a dreadful alcoholic; even one of the many Gideonites who supported preemption quipped, "if you catch him before ten, you will find him sober and clear; but then he doesn't get up till quarter of ten." Enough complaints about Smith's inability to discharge his duty flitted to Washington to move Wisconsin's Senator James Doolittle, who had recommended the three commissioners, to ask Chase in February to terminate Smith. He was finished by the end of the month.²³⁶

Chase found himself caught between his desire to see the freedpeople preempt land on a large scale and the strictures of existing law. On February 6 he reluctantly gave an order that greatly cheered Brisbane, perhaps that the auction must go forward as planned. Then on the eleventh, citing the necessity of yielding to the majority of commissioners "unless for good cause the President shall see fit otherwise to direct," Chase officially "suspended" Lincoln's instructions of December 31. Brisbane was overwhelmed with relief and expressed his gratitude to Chase by affirming the wisdom of Chase's reversal. By now Brisbane was ready to fix blame on Saxton directly, calling his agenda a "wild scheme, that out radicals all the radicalism I ever heard of in agrarian history . . . he has sadly disappointed me." Brisbane claimed that every "man of

²³⁶ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 232-34; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 287-88.

intelligence” he talked with agreed with his position, the exceptions being those keen on getting their own lands out of the preemption plan and those who owed their jobs to Saxton’s pleasure, like Mansfield French.²³⁷

French was devastated by Chase’s decision, but he did not give up. In a plaintive February 15 letter to the secretary, he lamented,

The willows bend again under the weight of broken harps [Psalm 137:2]. The voice of joy & thanksgiving has given way to mourning. But our Heavenly Father sometimes permits even his own children to mingle cups of sorrow for the innocent, to prepare the way for a greater good. I trust God will raise up some Mordecai, or Queen Esther to protect his poor people, from the cruel effects of your late suspending order of any further preemptions. I am assured your *heart* has not to be changed to do it, for that will ever, as heretofore, be true to God & his downtrodden people.

The typological comparison is clear: the blacks were the oppressed Jews, Chase the deceived King Ahasuerus, French the supplicating Mordecai/Esther, and Brisbane the wicked, genocidal Haman. French continued,

Not more fervent & touching it seems to me, could have been the prayers to heaven of God’s people for deliverance from Ahasuerus’ fatal decree, than are the prayers of these thousands for deliverance from the sad, sickening & cruel consequences if the homes of the poor freedmen secured by the late instructions *shall not be confirmed to them. That was the work of God, & God never overthrows his own work.* My faith is strong that you will be able to discern the will of God in the matter & that all will come out right. The gallows may not be used for the builder but God’s people shall be saved.

It was merciful of French not to wish Brisbane to be strung up on gallows, but his larger point was to enjoin mercy for the exposed freedpeople, “God’s people.” He was sure that God would see it through and begged Chase to get back onto God’s side.²³⁸

²³⁷ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 288; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 4:292-93.

²³⁸ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 15, 1864, SPC.

Such was French's confidence that the preemption plan had been eternally decreed by God that he vocally resisted its suspension and urged rebellion against the September orders. In one of the few faceoffs between French and Brisbane that we know of, the doctor said that the lands that were reserved for the freedpeople in September "were enough for them." French retorted, "[S]o they are if no man is to be allowed over five or ten acres, and you intend to keep them dependent, & discourage them from enlisting as soldiers, & if you too, wish to crowd them together & form an exclusive negro settlement, a measure perfectly abhorrent to their feelings, as well as ruinous to their future elevation." This reply is a good indication of how engrossed French had become in this conflict. Although the part of his rebuke about farm size and dependency has weight, it was *French's* plan that would lead to "exclusive negro settlement," and when had Brisbane ever discouraged blacks from "enlisting as soldiers"?²³⁹

French took his insurgency public. On February 14 French attended the funeral of Reverend Phillips, the missionary who had been serving as the pastor of the Baptist church on St. Helena Island. At the end of the service, French stepped forward to address words of condolence to the pastor's widow and the bereaved congregants. Then his remarks took a shockingly inappropriate turn. In the words of a witness, French

said he had come over partly to attend the funeral and partly to sympathize with and comfort them in view of the "cloud of sadness" which was passing over them in consequence of the action of the Gov^t at Washington. . . . He showed the people how happy they were a few weeks since when he and others were there to tell them of their right to preempt; and also showed them how sad they were then (at the funeral) on account of the suspension of those "Instructions."

Although he "exhorted them still to believe the Government friendly to them," he also

²³⁹ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 292.

urged them that if Chase's suspension continued, they should stay on their claims and resist the government's efforts to drive them off until it finally gave up. Both the missionary who witnessed French's behavior and Solomon Peck, who conducted the funeral, were appalled and supplied evidence of French's disloyalty to the government to William Henry Brisbane, who used it to urge Joseph Lewis to get French banished from the department.²⁴⁰

French was not finished. On February 21 he was back preaching at the same church and according to teacher Laura Towne, he

told the people to hold on to their preempted lands and all might come out right yet, and when they wanted to plant crop, to take what they needed and defend it with their hoe handles. He said that Mr. Philbrick and Mr. Thorpe were honest, but were getting rich by the labor of the blacks, and while they were lining their pockets, their laborers were no richer at the end of the year than they were at the beginning. He urged them to plant for themselves rather than for others.

The young Towne and her colleague took French aside after the service and remonstrated forcefully with him for a long time. These women and the missionaries scandalized by the funeral were in favor of the preemption plan and agreed with French that it was in the best interests of the freedpeople. But active resistance against the government—in a time of civil war!—was another matter entirely. French, who was disliked by many anyway, was swiftly losing his support. An evangelical missionary at Port Royal expressed his opinion to the American Missionary Association that “Mr French does not do the comm[issioners] justice in his statements. I think they are seeking the good of the Freedmen, with *far less selfishness*, than Mr French.” Even the blacks were getting sick of French's antics. “[W]e don't want to hear any more about land on Sundays,” some told

²⁴⁰ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 289-91.

one missionary; “we’ve heard enough, we want to hear the Gospel.”²⁴¹

To French’s credit—and typical of the esteem he gave to women’s counsel, unusual for his time—he patiently listened to Towne’s rebuke after church and stopped fomenting open rebellion. But he had not given up the fight. For the first time French himself wrote to Commissioner Lewis in Washington. He was sure that Lewis “must labor under a mistake, that you certainly did not want to deprive these unfortunate creatures of homes.” French insisted that the only people on the Sea Islands who stood against the December 31 instructions were speculators and “anti-slavery and anti-negro men”—a category that patently included Brisbane, Wording, and Philbrick. Expressing grief like his “heart has never [had] for the last two years,” French begged Lewis to “*confirm all properly made claims of the people to their twenty acres*” as the only way to avoid irreparable harm. If Lewis, Chase, Lincoln, or Congress had granted this request, Saxton and French’s plan would have prevailed in one stroke, but the word did not come. French’s oft-used tactic of going to the top and flattering authority figures was not working anymore.²⁴²

While French pled with Washington the auctions had started proceeding on February 18 amid bewildering chaos. Besides the massive headache caused by conflicting sets of property lines—one authorized by the tax commission and the other associated with the preemptions—Smith, who was still serving as commissioner, resisted every parcel that Brisbane brought up for auction on the grounds that it had been preempted.

²⁴¹ Holland, *Letters and Diary*, 129-30; William T. Richardson to Simeon S. Jocelyn, March 3, 1864, AMA H5293; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 290.

²⁴² Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 291-92.

This first attempt at auction ending in failure, buyers (and Brisbane and Wording) were assured by departmental headquarters one week later that purchasers endeavoring to enter and possess their properties “will be protected in all their rights . . . if necessary by armed force” against threats of violence rumored to come from preemptors. Smith exploded. He interpreted General Gillmore’s order (incorrectly) as military dispossession that would strip preemptors of their guaranteed rights to the crops that they already planted, and he further considered Gillmore to be infringing on Saxton’s authority. But Smith abruptly was forced to resign around the same time, and without him the auction proceeded smoothly. Land sold at the startlingly high price of eleven dollars per acre, far beyond freedpeople’s reach. The State of South Carolina was well on its way to meeting its obligations under the Revenue Act.²⁴³

This might have settled the question of whether or not the preemption claims held good were it not for ambiguous and carefully chosen words in Chase’s February 11 order: the December 31 instructions were “suspended until otherwise ordered”—not “revoked” or “annulled.” What did “suspended” mean? Did it indicate that the “suspension” might be lifted, the preemptions sustained, and the late auction transactions nullified?

The key to the delicate wording was a deep political game playing out within Lincoln administration. Radical Republicans in 1863 had been growing frustrated with the pace and ambiguity of Lincoln’s emancipation policy and with the influence of conservatives in the Cabinet. Provoked by a mild amnesty proclamation issued by Lincoln on December 8, Representative Thaddeus Stevens, Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy,

²⁴³ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 234; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 293-96.

and others began planning to nominate Chase for president to overthrow Lincoln within the party. This was the very period that Chase amended Lincoln's original orders for the distribution of government-owned land at Port Royal and endorsed a plan according to similar ideals in the Mississippi Valley. Chase believed that by pushing administration policy in this direction he could force Lincoln either to adopt radical policy or to reveal his true conservative colors. Chase hoped thereby to isolate Lincoln within the party on the issue of freedpeople and win the Republican nomination for president. Thus, when French asked Chase to make preemption the rule, Chase seized it as a chance to make Lincoln prove his conservatism by refusing the request. But Lincoln did not take the bait—he signed the new instructions that Chase prepared for the tax commissioners. When the subsequent controversy forced Chase to retreat from the order, he tried to pin Lincoln down again, noting with regret that the conservative course must be followed in South Carolina “unless for good cause the President shall see fit otherwise to direct.” Chase hoped to put Lincoln on the horns of a dilemma he could not escape.

As it happened, however, Chase's plan utterly backfired because of Lincoln's savvy and Chase's miscalculation: the secretary was positioned far to the left of the rest of the party. When Senator Pomeroy went public with a circular on February 20 endorsing Chase for president, Republican organizations all over the North repudiated it and lined up behind Lincoln. It was Chase who was isolated; he meekly retreated and declined interest in the presidency in less than two weeks. The order undoing the suspension would never be given.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 288; Louis S. Gerteis, “Salmon P. Chase, Radicalism, and the Politics of Emancipation, 1861–1864,” *Journal of American History* 60, no. 1 (June 1973): 57–60.

Presidential ambitions aside, however, Chase truly preferred the preemption plan of Saxton, French, and Smith on its merits as policy. Standing above the warring parties, he did not believe about them what they believed about each other: he was convinced that both sides had the freedpeople's best interests at heart. But after it became obvious that Lincoln would never approve preemption if those concerned about blacks' well-being were disunited over the issue, Chase challenged Brisbane to defend his view. "Is it your policy to make them independent cultivators of their own lands, or to make them the dependents of the land-holders?" Chase pointedly asked. "What will be the effect of having small tracts of twenty acres each, with larger tracts of three hundred and twenty acres in close vicinity? Will not the small tract-holders be obliged to sell out to the larger?" Chase demanded "a clear idea of the methods and expected practical results of the action you prefer." Yet there was no realistic chance that Brisbane's wishes would be overturned, and the commissioner probably knew it. He did not reply until the end of March, when he gave a cursory defense of his position and again criticized Saxton for causing "all sorts of unnecessary trouble."²⁴⁵

French had not stopped causing trouble, publishing in the *Free South* four strongly worded but substantively weak criticisms of the September 16, 1863 instructions for the disposition of the land. This time William E. Wording weighed in to refute French point by point in a letter to Chase. Wording concluded with an ad hominem that he was probably storing up for a long time: "In the moral constitution of Mr. French, there is an obliquity or an inaccuracy, (to say the least), which entirely unfits him for business.

²⁴⁵ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 4:310-11.

In saying this, I but reiterate the sentiments of nearly all the friends of freedom in this Department.” Yet French remained defiant. “Saxton is discouraged,” he wrote,

but *I never!!* We are fighting a *moral victory* & somebody must stand. I shall never be driven from the field by persecutions. “Should such a man as I flee, or go into the temple to hide myself?” [Nehemiah 6:11] If the Lord call, or order it, I go. The enemies would hold a jubilee were I to leave. . . . The great danger now is that the government will favor capitalists, & these poor people will be left “hewers of wood & drawers of water” [Joshua 9:21-27] with only from 2 to 4 or 6 acres of land for a home. My heart sickens at the thought. How vain and selfish the policy. How cruel to the negroes, & offensive to God. . . . To accord to [the freedman], what is accorded to the Irish, Dutch [i.e., German] or English will alone insure permanent peace. Short of it will provoke God to send a scourge in another form.²⁴⁶

French was also pained that his old friend Edward Thomson had written an editorial in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* praising Edward S. Philbrick’s enterprise and endorsing the sale of land to freedpeople at market rate. “That course will put the lands forever beyond the reach of the freedmen, & only change the form of slavery,” French insisted. “It is a people educated, enterprising, productive, & not *cash* that makes a country. I hesitate not to say Mr Philbrick’s *success* has been to the *detriment* of the poor negroes. He has got *rich* in one year. The people have only the clothes on their backs.” French wrote the *Christian Advocate* to tell Thomson so himself, albeit in more careful language. French, remembering the genesis of the mission as he intended it to be, not as it was, claimed that “[t]he government did not undertake this experiment to make money, but, first, to provide properly for the thousands of people emancipated by Providence, and secondly, to see if they could be made self-supporting.” He continued by asking what the greater value was in the calculus over the confiscated land: “Does the

²⁴⁶ Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 4:309-11; M. French to A. French?, date unknown (1864), FFP.

government need most to make money out of these lands, or to raise upon them an enlightened and industrious people, who will be a blessing to the government and nation in proportion as the government deals wisely and justly with them?" French insisted that if the Union would only "[p]lace an army of one hundred thousand colored soldiers in the South, and give these families and the heads of all others a home with from twenty to eighty acres of land, at a very low price . . . we shall never have again a rebellion in favor of slavery, nor the judgments of God upon us because of slavery."²⁴⁷

French still held out forlorn hope that the suspension might be revoked because of an envoy sent by Chase to South Carolina in April named Austin Smith. Smith's primary mission was to mediate a labor dispute that had broken out on Philbrick's plantations—a byproduct of the preemption controversy and the unsettling speeches of advocates like French—but he also hoped to find a workable solution to the conflict over preempted land. There were still lands left in government possession, and Smith recommended all of them be made available for purchase by the freedmen under the terms and at the rate detailed in the September 16 order. This significantly increased blacks' access to landownership and formed a happy ending of sorts.²⁴⁸

Nevertheless, gloom still hung over Port Royal. The associates of Edward Philbrick—whom Austin Smith persuaded to raise his employees' wages again—smugly looked on the affair with disdain for both sides. The bulk of the Gideonites believed that Philbrick's party and the tax commissioners had betrayed the freedpeople. Saxton, beaten,

²⁴⁷ M. French to A. French?, date unknown (1864), FFP; Mansfield French, "The Freedmen of South Carolina," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 21, 1864.

²⁴⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 248-49.

was forced to surrender; feeling utterly unsupported by the administration, he despondently asked to be relieved. French knew that his bridges were burnt with everyone but the freedpeople. In at least one respect Brisbane was right: French's influence at Port Royal was entirely dependent on Rufus Saxton. If Saxton departed, French expected that he would be forced to do the hospital chaplaincy work that officially was his job. He shuddered at the prospect, admitting that although that ministry was important, he did not believe that he could handle it—most men in that line of work eventually broke down. If Saxton left, French would probably leave too.²⁴⁹

Saxton's request was not granted, however; he was staying. Still charged with the freedpeople's welfare, Saxton resignedly required every new plantation owner to state to his command the terms of employment of his laborers, and he ordered his district superintendent to read those terms to the employees and warn those who protested them that they continued working at their own risk. For of course, it was the bulk of the freedpeople who suffered the most. Their hopes had been raised just to be dashed; some had relocated just to fall into dependency to a different white employer. Ownership of their own plot of ground looked as distant as ever. Yet their deepest bitterness was toward the United States government that had promised so much just to snatch it away. A wariness and distrust of Northern whites crept into the freedpeople that affected their attitudes and choices for the rest of the war and into Reconstruction. Sadly, their suspicions proved to be well-founded. Ironically, however, this wariness also drove blacks to greater independence and self-sufficiency than before, evoking from them an

²⁴⁹ Pearson, *Letters from Port Royal*, 163; M. French to A. French, March 26, 1864, FFP.

assertiveness toward whites, including paternalistic benefactors, that had previously been lacking. In many cases, Northerners on the Sea Islands were irritated by what they saw as mounting insubordination and ingratitude that they might instead have recognized as new blooms of freedom.²⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the sour taste that accompanied blacks' rising self-respect was chiefly attributable to the conspiracy of Rufus Saxton, Abram D. Smith, James Thompson, and Mansfield French above any other source. Regardless of the merit of their proposal and the weight of their arguments, it was these men—and the jousting Chase and Lincoln on high—who made promises on the government's behalf that it would never keep.

Ironically, Thompson bought a plantation at the auction with French's son Mansfield Joshua, and they started planting cotton. Smith's drinking killed him the following year (so French understood).²⁵¹ Saxton and French doggedly returned to work among the freedpeople, their destinies still linked. Yet in one respect the comrades diverged, because French learned an important lesson: unlike Saxton, he never again disregarded an order from the President of the United States, whether he liked it or not.

Strong Meat

The preemption controversy was essentially finished, but French's advocacy for land for the freedpeople was not, not remotely. He returned home on a month-long leave

²⁵⁰ "Circular No. 4," clipping, FFP; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 255; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 249-51.

²⁵¹ M. French to A. French, April 2, 1864, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 13, 1865, FFP.

of absence in May to conduct momentous business on behalf of the *Beauty of Holiness*,²⁵² and while in New York he spoke twice at the Church of the Puritans, where George B. Cheever was using his pulpit to hammer the Lincoln administration for adopting antislavery policies out of expedience, not justice.²⁵³ Following suit, French used the summer of 1864 to propound more forcefully than ever his interpretation of the true nature of the war in the plan of God and to rebuke the nation for its stubborn refusal to comprehend it. "So many are fighting only 'for the Union,' & all looking towards 'reconstruction,' instead of '*destruction*,'" he wrote to Austa:

When a man is dead his friends bury him, not merely because he has become useless but lest decomposition ensue & endanger the lives of his friends. The South is worse than dead. It has become a stench in the nostrils of all healthy nations, & God has resolved on its burial, in mercy to the nation. Many hold on to the dead carcass, & some want to embalm it. It must get into the grave.

"I have taken strong advanced ground, but I believe no stronger than God has," he continued. "I have found a favorite text, Deut. 33:29.²⁵⁴ Israel meaning the Freedmen." In July he preached to about a thousand children and two thousand adults. Knowing exactly how to elicit the most enthusiastic joy from the people, he concluded by reciting the words of a spiritual: "O praise an tanks! De Lord he comin/To set his people free."²⁵⁵

French did not confine his voice to ultraprogressive Northern churches and friendly freedpeople, however. That summer he wrote perhaps the most powerful pieces

²⁵² See p. 519.

²⁵³ Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, August 31, 1864; F-382; 1864; M619, roll 0228. "The Anniversaries in Brief," *Independent*, May 19, 1864; "Notices," *New York Evangelist*, May 19, 1864.

²⁵⁴ "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

²⁵⁵ M. French to A. French, July 9, 1864, FFP.

of his life for publication. French blasted the North's unprincipled emancipation policy, its false assumption that God was on its side, and its idolatrous faith in its generals; he demanded warfare of unmitigated severity to secure Universal Freedom; and he cast an imminent millennial vision of a racially egalitarian America that proved to be far ahead of its time. These stormy, but not bitter, writings might be termed "apocalyptic." French called them "strong meat."²⁵⁶

"By 1864 both North and South had acknowledged that generals stood as a breed apart," Harry S. Stout writes, "as 'brilliant' in the business of killing as philosophers with ideas or painters on canvas. They stood as the warrior priests of America's dawning civil religion, entrusted with making the sacrificial blood offerings that would incarnate the national faith." The commanders even joined their respective presidents, Lincoln and Davis, as the subjects of songs of praise. Discordantly, French condemned these heroes as "the leaders of . . . funeral trains" and mocked his country's foolish confidence in men:

No sooner has something a little extraordinary been achieved, than the man is "lionised". Editors try to outdo each other in their encomiums. Laudation meetings are held, and there is no rest to the people till the President & Senate have elevated him to the rank of a Brigadier, a Major, or Lieutenant, Generalship. By verdict of the country he is a prodigy, & therefore he will do a prodigious work. "No more Bull Runs, now", "Richmond falls", "Sumter tumbles", & "the rebellion gives up the ghost". Alas, alas, how blind men are. Providence had begun the good work of making generals, that are generals, for us, & we were so tickled with the framework, that we have taken the work into our own hands—& having finished & crowned our idol, God has left us to find out our folly by a most mortifying & costly process, while he has been casting about for another deliverer.

These sometime victorious generals did not exhibit character commensurate with their acclaim, especially by refusing to prioritize justice to blacks, so God let them fall. The

²⁵⁶ M. French to A. French, July 9, 1864, FFP.

right attitude was modeled centuries before by King David, who wrote,

“Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me into Edom?” Did David ask this of his generals? He knew their impotence without divine guidance. Therefore he says, “Wilt not thou, O God, which hadst cast us off? And thou, O God, which didst not go out with our armies?” [Psalm 60:9-10; 108:10-11] . . . Were this war to end now, who would be the heroes of all our songs? On whom is the government resting? . . . Does any one having the least faith in a divine Providence doubt that we might long since have reached the end of the war had we accepted the Lord of hosts as our captain?

An idolatrous nation had only itself to blame for “the waste of human life, & putting off the dawn of peace.”²⁵⁷

French believed that a victorious peace would come when three conditions were met. First, the government must adopt the full freedom, elevation, and welfare of blacks as its supreme policy objective and war aim, because in fact it was God’s. The nation must no longer strive for Emancipation as a means to Union, but Union as a means to Emancipation, and Emancipation as a means to equality and brotherhood of whites and blacks together. This the North clearly had not done. “Let not the nation deceive itself,”

French warned:

It struck off the chains of the slave, and why? To save its own life, but not the life of the slave. It has invited, yea, compelled the freedmen to use the sword and meet the dangers of the field, and why? To put down the white man’s foes, but not the bondman’s enemies. It does not say to him, Come, let us make common cause. Your enemies shall be our enemies. Our last foe will not be vanquished so long as you have one remaining. We will be brothers in arms till we can be neighbors in freedom.

Northern whites were reluctant because “not a few, especially in the ‘higher circle,’ military and (un)civil, are as much anti-negro, as anti-slavery. Some would abolish,

²⁵⁷ Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 383; M. French, “Omens in Southern Skies,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; Mansfield French, untitled article? (“God allowed the Canaanites”), FFP; M. French, “The End Cometh, but Not Yet,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864.

altogether, the race; others would only colonize them out of the country, agreeably to President Lincoln's plan." Referring to his enemies the Unitarians, who denied the full divinity of Christ, French alleged,

There is a large class, especially in New England, who would un-crown the Lord of Glory. Is it strange then that multitudes are found who deny manhood of the African? Hatred to slavery and violent opposition to professed [Southern] Christians, are not inconsistent with sharp prejudices, and even hatred, against the poor negro.

Because of its racist animus, the government and its army still did not realize that God had sent it against the South on a

double mission of subduing the slave-power, the instigator of the rebellion, and the release of the captives. While the nation has boastingly drawn the sword of "Union & the Constitution," it has shunned the cross of humanity. We have insisted on fighting our "brothers in arms," rather than the enemies of God & humanity. . . . [I]f heaven ever grant[s] us victory & peace throughout the entire land, it will be when the moral ends of justice & freedom are reached, not merely the restoration of the Union & the vindication of the Constitution.²⁵⁸

Second, the government must raise an independent, all-black "army of liberation" of twenty thousand soldiers, which he and Saxton had longed to see since the coastal raid they planned in November 1862. Rather than use these black troops for labor, fatigue detail, garrisons, and reserve positions while whites did the fighting, the government should put commanders "that fear God and love freedom"—officers with "faith in God, and faith in the black man"—at the head of these columns and throw them not at the Confederate capital Richmond but at the rural heart of the Deep South. French was

²⁵⁸ French, "The End Cometh, but Not Yet," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864; French, "Omens in Southern Skies," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; Mansfield French, untitled article? ("Charleston, like Richmond"), FFP.

unconcerned about traditional strategic objectives.²⁵⁹ If the war was a moral war of liberation against immoral enemies, then the stronghold was not the seat of government or industrial or rail centers but the homes of evil planters where the majority of slaves remained in bondage. In fact, in the fall of 1863 French had pled with Salmon P. Chase to use his influence to form a force along these lines to conquer Florida. French relied on the Jews' aggressive self-defense against genocide in Esther's day as his model; therefore this black army would be ordered that "not a man, woman or child was to be harmed, unless they first drew the sword upon" the liberators. French was certain that, just as many awed Persians became Jews in the face of their righteous onslaught, "[t]he triumph of a black army would soon bring nearly all rebeldom down to the mourner's bench, and be honored with conversions of the Old Testament kind, without number." However, all unrepentant "reprobates" that insisted on attacking this legion—including Jefferson Davis—would be shown no mercy, and "Haman's gallows would be sure to catch them." (As it happened, Confederates facing black Union troops were not terrified into repentance but rather were enraged. Ironically, they frequently reversed French's rules of engagement by massacring captured black combatants as French intended Union soldiers to do to them, including during a disastrous Federal campaign in Florida earlier in 1864.)²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ French dabbled in military strategy on one other occasion as the originator of a daring but thwarted raid to tap the Confederate telegraph wire between Savannah and Charleston and steal its messages in September 1863. See *War of the Rebellion*, I, 18, part 1:728-30; John Howard Brown, ed., *Lamb's Biographical Dictionary of the United States* (Boston: James H. Lamb Co., 1900), s.v. "French, Mansfield"; Lyman D. Stickney to M. French, September 29, 1863, FFP; Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettlinger, eds., *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 146.

²⁶⁰ French, "Omens in Southern Skies," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, October 10, 1863, SPC; Levine, *Fall of the House*, 193-95. Cf. pp. 295-96 above.

French realized that the rules of warfare that he had in mind made some Northerners squeamish. Yet he insisted that although

[s]uch an army dealing death-blows only against murderous assailants, might shock those of delicate nerves . . . it would quell the rebellion with far less loss of life, and with a degree of both *justice* and *mercy*, that has been wanting in many a move that has only spared rebels, and entombed thousands of our brave, loyal soldiers.

French was certain that in the long run it was a mercy to both North and South to abandon all restrictions in the conduct of war that limited Confederate deaths, including taking prisoners in battle. This was his third prescription for Union victory. French's rationale came directly from God's commands to Joshua:

God allowed the Canaanites to possess their land until their cup of iniquity was full, after which their destruction was determined & the children of Israel were appointed the executioners of the decree. The order was peremptory & sweeping, "Thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them. . . . Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant & mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments to a thousand generations, and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them ## Thou shalt not be affrighted at them, for the Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. . . . Deut. 7. Here we have an epitome of Old Testament theology and Old Testament justice touching God's dealings with nations. Are we taught in the gospel dispensation that God has changed the principles of his government, or that nations have so improved that they are no longer put on probation?

French meant his question to be rhetorical.²⁶¹

The Union's problem was that it was self-satisfied: having adopted emancipation as official policy, Northerners believed that they had repented of their sins, they fought for truth and justice, and God was on their side. French begged to differ. "Many think we are near the end now because God is more than ever acknowledged," he observed.

²⁶¹ French, "Omens in Southern Skies," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; French, untitled article? ("God allowed the Canaanites"), FFP. Cf. pp. 293-95 above.

However, a “recognition induced by sorest of trials might end with the trials, and God be again cast out of the nation’s thoughts. It is questionable which have cost us most, our struggles against the rebellion, or our antagonism against God.” French asserted that God was bent on purging the Union of its “pride, prejudice, and infidelity” and that he was too merciful to allow the bloodshed to cease before the work was done. The North’s stubbornness in sin was what prolonged the war, not Southern armies.²⁶²

That pretended Northern godliness was only lip service was evident from the North’s tenderheartedness toward the South:

If justice remain justice, & the God of justice still reign over the affairs of nations, then indeed is the voice of God & the command of God concerning the South as it was concerning Babylon. “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her, even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double, according to her works; in the cups which she hath filled, fill to her double. How much she hath glorified herself, & lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her; for she saith, in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, & shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her” Rev. 18:5.

If our experience in the Department of the South has impressed any solemn & important truths & facts upon our mind, it has been the applicability of all the above solemn & terrible language to the South in so far as it or any part thereof is in sympathy with the rebellion.

To French it was a question of leadership. “If the above scriptures express the judgement & designs of Providence as regards the originators and present abettors of the rebellion, are the[re] men now at the helm of state or front of our army who are willing to be God’s ministers” of wrath? In order to fight the war of annihilation that French intended, “we must have Joshuas to lead our forces, who can not only capture ring leaders, but can

²⁶² Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 328-29; French, “The End Cometh, but Not Yet,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864.

command their captains ‘to slay them & hang them on trees’ (Joshua X:26).”

Denunciations of the Union’s political and military leadership this severe and advocacy for a warfare this harsh probably kept some of these articles out of publication and nearly denied the rest.²⁶³

The other fact that belied Northerners’ religiosity, in French’s view, was their obstinate refusal to view blacks as human beings like themselves. “The putting down of iniquity is good,” French wrote, but

the establishment of justice is better. Breaking the chains of the bondmen is commendable, but investing him with all his rights is nobler. To accept the judgment of God rather than insist upon the requirements of our prejudices as to the extent of those rights would no doubt soon end all controversy, both with the rebels and with God.

French called out race prejudice in his own Methodist Episcopal Church, evidenced by a “disposition to colonize African Christians” and the denomination’s willingness to appoint white preachers to blacks but its discomfort appointing black preachers to whites. French saw a segregated ministry emerging and hated it. “Has not Christ commissioned and anointed [blacks] as his apostles, pastors and teachers?” he asked. “Will our church acknowledge the Master’s ordination? Or must they be first countersigned by the church before they pass current?” Until Northerners faced up to their bigotry and repented of it, “storm is better than calm, and war is a necessity.”²⁶⁴

Yet if the North would only align itself with God’s program, French foresaw a

²⁶³ French, untitled article? (“Charleston, like Richmond”), FFP; French, untitled article? (“God allowed the Canaanites”), FFP; French, “The End Cometh, but Not Yet,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864.

²⁶⁴ French, “The End Cometh, but Not Yet,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864; French, “Omens in Southern Skies,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864.

millennial destiny for the nation that he called “a new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” emerging from the chaos of Southern iniquity. He sometimes qualified this phrase from 2 Peter 3:13 with the word “political,” but other times he did not, which leaves open the question whether he believed that the war, rightly concluded, might produce the conditions of justice, peace, freedom, and holiness that would usher in the return of Christ. In either case, he saw the new creation unfolding before his eyes in South Carolina:

On the very soil where their oppressors have tried to prove that the African had no manhood, they now are resolved to show an elevated, Christian type of manhood. Already many have become owners of plantations and princely houses of South Carolina chivalry. They now sow and reap for themselves alone. They are already building school-houses; and no one, who carefully observes their development, gradual, but no less certain, whether prosperity or adversity be their lot, can doubt that they will soon be interested in colleges, in steamboats and rail cars. They will bear the burdens of taxation for state or national purposes, they will cheerfully obey laws, and honor rulers, but they will insist on having a voice in making both.

This was the uncomfortable sticking point for Northern whites. Once the nation had allowed blacks to own land, taxed them, and put them in uniform and sent them into battle, and once these men promised to keep law and order in the South when the war was over, how, French demanded, could the country withhold from them the right to vote and even serve in state legislatures and Congress itself? If these noble warriors crossed swords with the Southern aristocracy and vanquished them on the battlefield, how could they not replace them in the halls of government?²⁶⁵

It is far too easy for twenty-first-century people to consider French’s argument for

²⁶⁵ Mansfield French to George Whipple, July 30, 1863, AMA H5230; French, “Omens in Southern Skies,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; French, “The End Cometh, but Not Yet,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864.

blacks' political access to be logical, even tautological. Many Americans today view suffrage as essentially a universal birthright with almost no restrictions; local government, which a voter might influence, as unimportant; national government, which a voter cannot influence, as all-important; and elected office as the province of distant, party-managed professionals. It is taken for granted that people can and even should vote even if they are stupid or immoral, both because it is their right and because their votes probably will not affect anything anyway. Today's Americans also live in a nation with numerous educated, moral, well-mannered, responsible, prosperous, and admired black citizens. French's America was entirely different. Suffrage was still considered a privilege, not a right, and not a concomitant of citizenship; there were still white men who were not eligible to vote, not to mention all the women of the nation. Americans still believed (although the reality was quickly changing) that their country was distinguished by "self-government." In the country they knew, local politics (until the war) impacted the average citizen much more obviously and frequently than national government, and elected office, though not claimed by everyone, was nevertheless a community service role filled at its lower levels mainly by men who were professionals at something else. The vote mattered. This being the case, with America's experiment in liberty still young and with disunion threatening to prove it a failure forever, everyone agreed that voters ought to be sensible and intelligent men of character and elected officials more so. Obviously there were thousands of voters (and officials) who were not, but that did not justify bringing into government millions who could not read, whose peculiar accent sounded like a foreign language, whose customs were strange and even savage, whose

morals, especially as to lying, stealing, shirking, and fornicating, were highly suspect, and who had no taxable property.

French's claims about blacks' character and their rapid social and economic progress, therefore, were striking; his claims for their rights were shocking. Edward Thomson printed one of French's letters in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* as food for thought despite Thomson's resistance to the notion "that freedmen should be at once clothed with all the immunities of the republic." French, like very few in his time, saw blacks for what they were in God's eyes and what they would someday be in Americans' eyes far more vividly than he saw the features that drew disgust, amusement, and patronizing pity from contemporary whites. To French, the future was the present, and justice required that blacks get the rights immediately that they would prove worthy of soon. If the nation would only see blacks as he did and as God did and if they only saw the South as it was, then a righteous peace would come, he was sure. "[L]et no man fear as to the future . . . ," French urged, "provided, we put away our national sins, and accept universal freedom as the corner & capstone of our nationality."²⁶⁶

Resettlement: The Third Battle for Land

The fallout from the battle over preemption, intertwined with Salmon P. Chase's humiliating bid for the presidency, reconfigured the relationship between Chase and Mansfield French. French could not bring himself to doubt Chase's commitment to blacks' uplift, yet he could not understand how Chase could have suspended the orders

²⁶⁶ French, "The End Cometh, but Not Yet," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 7, 1864; M. French to Salmon P. Chase, October 2, 1863, FFP.

that supported preemption. Moreover, Chase's influence in the administration was gone, so French had no more reason to entreat him. By July 1864 Lincoln had maneuvered the defanged Chase into a politically impotent resignation from his Cabinet. French, a bit ironically, was always concerned about Chase's restless ambition and judged that the secretary "overleaped the mark." For Chase's part, he also could not bring himself to doubt French's genuineness. However, he was offended by what French had done in the formation of the *Free South*, he was exasperated by French's antagonism toward William Henry Brisbane and his behavior during the preemption controversy, and he believed that French published excerpts of Chase's letters without permission. Relations were cool between the two men for a few months, but they mended fences in September, agreeing to disagree on certain matters and putting the past behind them. They remained sincere friends for some years.²⁶⁷

French's political activity thus found new outlets. In March he had written to George Julian, a prominent radical leader from Indiana in the House of Representatives and a tireless advocate of land reform. In 1864 and 1865 Julian proposed legislation to extend the Homestead Act of 1862 to confiscated plantations in the South and to repeal Congress's 1862 resolution that declared the term of confiscation to be limited to the life of the property owner. This would have effectively writ large Saxton and French's preemption scheme over substantial portions of the South. Yet despite Republicans' interest, the two houses could not agree on the precise form of the legislation before the

²⁶⁷ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, March 8, 1861, SPC; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, May 5, 1862, SPC; M. French to A. French, July 9, 1864, FFP; Salmon P. Chase to M. French, September 16, 1864, FFP. For the *Free South* controversy, see pp. 351-52 above.

end of the Congress and the measure did not become law.²⁶⁸

Through an unusual set of circumstances, French also played a part in the Republican election campaign of 1864. Most Northerners on the Sea Islands went North in mid- to late summer to avoid an annual wave of disease that tended to kill whites who remained. That summer French stayed in Beaufort and was debilitated by malaria. In September he took a leave of absence to recuperate at Saratoga Springs, New York, a popular health resort centered on the “water cure,” a homeopathic regimen in which patients drank various mineral waters to treat illnesses. (Austa had grown quite fond of the place and had acquired the habit of convalescing there herself.) While at Saratoga, French served “strong meat” to a Union meeting composed of all the churches in the village and noted with joy, “My remarks, two years ago, would have scattered half the congregation, but their nerves bore up well under my abolition utterances. The millennium is coming.” Still weak, French applied for an extension of leave, which the army denied. On his way back to Beaufort by way of New York—and after receiving a clean bill of health from the surgeon general—representatives of the National Union Committee and the New York State Committee strenuously pressed French and many other officers passing through to stump on behalf of the Republican ticket in the upcoming election. The committee assured French that it could get the War Department to grant him a furlough until after the canvass was over, so he remained in New York until Lincoln and a Republican Congress swept to victory. Unfortunately, the New York politicians overpromised and underdelivered, so French faced a military commission in

²⁶⁸ M. French to George Julian, March 25, 1864, FFP; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 255-57.

February 1865 to determine whether he was derelict of duty during the canvass. Thanks to last-minute testimony from New York, he was exonerated.²⁶⁹

Meanwhile another opportunity to settle freedpeople on their own land was emerging, one more sweeping than Saxton and French had yet devised. It began inauspiciously when Saxton tendered his resignation on December 30. Saxton complained that his authority had continually been undercut and his assurances to the freedpeople had frequently been betrayed by other general officers and by the government. He also vented his bitter frustration at what he considered the obstacles and harassment placed in the freedpeople's way by tax commissioners Brisbane and Wording and by departmental headquarters, especially under its current commander, John G. Foster. Secretary Stanton refused Saxton's resignation, however; he had other plans for the general.²⁷⁰

After the capture and incineration of Atlanta in September 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman received approval from the Union high command for his audacious plan to march over sixty thousand men to Savannah, Georgia, taking what it needed in food, horses, mules, and wagons from the countryside and destroying the infrastructure along the way. In the five weeks of the march, thousands of slaves flocked to Sherman's army and followed it through Georgia as their vehicle for liberation. Sherman generally despised them. Although he had reluctantly come to accept Lincoln's emancipation policy

²⁶⁹ Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, August 31, 1864; F-382; 1864; M619, roll 0228. Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, October 5, 1864; F-427; 1864; M619, roll 0257. M. J. French to M. French, September 18, 1864, FFP; Mansfield French to George Whipple, October 12, 1864, AMA 87763. Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, November 11, 1864; F-521; 1864; M619, roll 0257. D. N. Cooley to Rufus Saxton, January 23, 1865, FFP. Mansfield French to N. C. Deering, February 15, 1865; enclosed in N. C. Deering to C. A. Dana, February 25, 1865; D-116; 1865; M619, roll 0346.

²⁷⁰ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 260-61; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 322-331.

as a war measure, he was not one of the Union officers who had come to admire blacks' talents and valor as soldiers, and he stubbornly resisted having any armed blacks in his army. He openly opined that blacks could not and should not be equal with whites and thereby gave racist encouragement to his many subordinates who agreed with him. As his callous annoyance with the refugees that followed his army trickled through the ranks, it resulted in atrocities committed against freedpeople at all levels of command. Yet nothing stopped the fugitives from coming.²⁷¹

This state of affairs posed multiple problems. It was another humanitarian crisis, and it vexed Edwin M. Stanton that it was occurring at Union hands. It was also becoming a public relations embarrassment for the administration before the outraged radical wing of the Republican Party. Yet perhaps the most pressing problem from the War Department's point of view was that the thousands of needy beggars encumbered Sherman's army. Sherman's force could not leave Savannah with the human baggage that it brought there.²⁷²

So in late December Stanton traveled to Savannah to meet with the general, and he met (or brought) Rufus Saxton and Mansfield French there as well. In Savannah French spoke to throngs of freedmen, encouraging them to lead exemplary lives that would reconcile their late masters to the reality of emancipation; he interviewed teachers for schools briskly founded and funded by Savannah's resident freedpeople; and he irritated Sherman and his staff. Meanwhile, Stanton and Sherman, in consultation with

²⁷¹ Levine, *Fall of the House*, 265-68. Cf. p. 331 above.

²⁷² Levine, *Fall of the House*, 268-69; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 257-58.

local black ministers, developed a plan that took official form in Sherman's Special Field Orders Number 15. In this sweeping dictum, Sherman designated the entire Sea Island region, from Charleston on the north to Florida's St. John's River on the south inland to a depth of thirty miles, to be settled exclusively by freedpeople on tracts of up to forty acres—the origin of the “forty acres and a mule” that former slaves came to expect from the government after the war. The Union command hoped thereby to dispose of the host of refugees that had followed Sherman's army through Georgia to Savannah as well as the swelling number that had successfully escaped to Port Royal over the previous three years. The task of resettlement was to be overseen by none other than Rufus Saxton, who though reluctant received hearty assurance from Stanton that the freedmen's titles to land would be permanent. Saxton received encouragement in March when Congress inserted a section into a bill to create a novel agency known as the Freedmen's Bureau²⁷³ that assigned every male refugee or freedman a maximum of forty acres of abandoned or confiscated land as a three-year lease with an option to buy at the end of the term. He may have been concerned, however, about Congress's less-than-emphatic promise of “such title thereto as the United States can convey.”²⁷⁴

In the meantime Saxton and French started up their dog and pony show again, holding mass meetings of thousands of freedpeople in Savannah in January and February 1865 to explain the new procedure for claiming their plots of ground and to enlist more

²⁷³ The Freedmen's Bureau's nature, purpose, and activity is described on pp. 428-29 and to a limited extent in the next section.

²⁷⁴ “Meeting of the Freedmen,” *Savannah Republican*, January 3, 1865; John W. Blassingame, “Before the Ghetto: The Making of the Black Community in Savannah, Georgia, 1865–1880,” *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 4 (Summer 1973): 471; Levine, *Fall of the House*, 269-70; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 258-60; Berlin, *Wartime Genesis*, 338-40; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 257.

men into the Union ranks. At a meeting on February 2, French exhorted the freedpeople,

Now, my friends, if your freedom were the gift of *man*, you might fear that it would be taken from you. Your freedom is the gift of God. The President of the United States proclaimed it to you; and General Sherman with his brave, heroic army, only *brought* to you what God had provided for you. It being therefore, not the work of man, but of God, no man can take it away from you.

French compared the freedpeople to the Israelite slaves who left Egypt but had not yet arrived in Canaan; just as the first thing that God wanted to provide for Israel was homesteads, French declared, so also the government was wisely providing the same for blacks. Although there was much prejudice against them in Savannah, on the islands there was no one to stop them. French urged the freedpeople to prove that their masters were wrong when they protested that blacks could not support themselves if they were free. They could start new communities with homes, schools, and churches and could prove that the government made the right decision by emancipating them. Settlement would not be easy, as the government was giving them next to no help to get started, but that was not a point that French wished to dwell on. Instead he deployed what became one of his favorite illustrations, the sort of folksy analogy that Unitarians deplored and blacks loved:

. . . I must tell you about the old hen, how she manages for her family. So soon as the little chicks are hatched, she begins to scratch for them and to learn them to scratch. So soon as they have learned how to scratch, off runs the old hen, clucking, as she goes, 'Now little chicks, you must scratch or die.' Did you ever see any young chicks that did not scratch out a living? You have scratched for your masters and yourselves too, in slavery, and cannot you do as much as the little chicks, now you are free? Let all who think they can, and are ready to try, raise their hands.

A journalist recorded that a "forest of arms all through the house suddenly rose, many

rising to their feet and raising both arms.”²⁷⁵

Introducing themes that he would articulate many times in 1865, French urged marital fidelity, non-retaliation when insulted, magnanimity toward former masters, care for the aged, infirm, and widows, and a firm halt to lying, stealing, swearing, drunkenness, and all other bad behavior. French asserted that upright conduct was a debt that the freedpeople owed to all the liberating Union soldiers who had fought, suffered, languished in prison camps, and died, all their bereaved families, and above all to the Savior who by his providence ordained that the blacks would get their freedom. French triumphantly concluded, “Then will we, ere long, stand together round the throne of God and forever sing the song of Moses and the Lamb [Revelation 15:2-4].” The meeting erupted in a roar of shouts and amens—the kingdom was coming.²⁷⁶

One week later French gave the same sort of talk in a long-awaited locale: Charleston, South Carolina, the birthplace of secession, whose defenders abandoned the city when Sherman’s oncoming horde threatened their rear. Accompanied by A. P. Ketchum, a young officer and son of a prominent New York abolitionist, French conducted a meeting in, of all places, the Charleston slave market. French asked the freedmen if they were liable to be scared off their new farms by whites. The men replied fiercely. “They may talk about one white man scaring five negroes,” one man growled,

²⁷⁵ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 262-64. “The Freedmen’s Meeting in Savannah,” *Savannah Republican*, February 5, 1865; enclosed in Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, February 28, 1865; F-174; 1865; M619, roll 0353. Saxton’s efforts at recruitment immediately ran afoul of his departmental commander, John G. Foster, yet again, and also with the commander of the Savannah District. Stanton relieved Foster in short order and returned the sympathetic Quincy A. Gillmore to the department. See *War of the Rebellion*, I, 47, part 2:186-87, 424-25.

²⁷⁶ “The Freedmen’s Meeting in Savannah,” *Savannah Republican*, February 5, 1865; enclosed in Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, February 28, 1865; F-174; 1865; M619, roll 0353.

“but he can’t scare one. It has been the *power* of slavery which has cowed us, but that power is gone. They can’t scare us now!” The freedmen did, however, ask shrewd questions about the legality and security of their titles under Special Field Orders Number 15. French continued working mostly in Charleston through April, leading meetings marked by the “profoundest emotion.”²⁷⁷

The war was ending even though the nation had, for the most part, ignored French’s prescription of the summer before. In one respect, however, the government responded to his demands. Union armies did not adopt a take-no-prisoners policy, but they did continue to escalate their severity toward the Confederacy’s war-making capacity, including its civilian population and property. As destructive as Sherman was in Georgia in the fall of 1864, more fearsome was Philip Sheridan’s torching of all the crops, barns, and many other structures in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. This move was calculated to eradicate a hotbed of guerilla activity, to remove a perennial avenue of attack against Washington, and to starve the Army of Northern Virginia, besieged in Petersburg and Richmond, into submission. Yet it also naturally resulted in the deaths of women, children, and the elderly by malnutrition and exposure through the winter. Sherman followed suit on his way through South Carolina; in the state that Northerners blamed for starting the war, his army showed no restraint. Nor did the slaves who were set free from the most brutal slave system in the South. In Sherman’s army’s wake, slaves rose up and plundered, burned, vandalized, and desecrated their owners’ property, defying masters

²⁷⁷“Letters from ‘Carleton,’” *The Liberator*, March 10, 1865. Mansfield French to Samuel Breck, April 30, 1865; F-307; 1865; M619, roll 0354. “From Charleston,” *New York Times*, March 19, 1865.

and committing violence against overseers.²⁷⁸

French was satisfied that the nation finally realized that it must unleash God's implacable wrath in order for the millennium to come. He mused about the few houses burned on the raid that he accompanied in 1862 and how it had been so scandalous that authorities in Washington did not want it made public. Now, Sherman's army having incinerated a swath of land forty miles wide through Georgia and burning even more widely in South Carolina, the Northern public was elated and feared only that the river of flame might stop before reaching Richmond. "Four years in the furnace fires of war, has wrought all this change in the public mind," French concluded. "It clearly shows what great things our God can do, and give us grace at first to bear only, and then to approve."²⁷⁹

The devastation paved the way for an awesome destiny for the United States, but French knew that victory in the war for freedom had not yet been won in Americans' hearts:

We are about entering upon a future purer, grander than we should ever have known, but for our national purgation. . . . But when the sword is laid by, then will commence a struggle involving the action of moral forces. There will be secessions and rebellions among and in ourselves against the order of things, civil and ecclesiastical, which God will establish in the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness," that he, not man, is about to establish, and that, not so much for our nation's, as his own glory.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 445-46; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 90-91.

²⁷⁹ M. French, "Promise of the End," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 29, 1865.

²⁸⁰ French, "Promise of the End," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, March 29, 1865.

THE USEFUL LIFE OF MANSFIELD FRENCH:
A MODEL OF MULTIVOCATIONAL MINISTRY

VOLUME III

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Georgia, 1865: The Aftermath of War

The American Civil War was studded with more ironies, large and small, than anyone can count. One of them played out in Beaufort, South Carolina on May 14, 1865, exactly one month after President Lincoln was assassinated and five days after his successor, Andrew Johnson, declared the war to be over. That day, a Sunday, three visitors—Salmon P. Chase, his daughter Nettie, and a guest—arose in Beaufort to attend the Baptist church on St. Helena Island. The guest was the august pastor of the Seventh Baptist Church of Baltimore, the Reverend Richard Fuller. In 1844-45 Baptists who had been united in support of common missionary societies split North and South over slavery, and Fuller was one of the architects of the resultant Southern Baptist Convention. Around the same time Fuller engaged in a rigorous and profound debate over the morality of slavery with Brown University's Baptist president Francis Wayland. Fuller was, in short, one of the country's preeminent defenders of slavery on biblical and theological grounds. He was also a son of Beaufort who possessed extensive property on the Sea Islands. In addition to his plantations, Fuller owned the house of his youth, the Tabby Manse, one of the grandest homes in Beaufort, which was built by his father in 1786. That May Sabbath morning, Fuller's boyhood home belonged to another minister, the Reverend Mansfield French, who had bought it for a song at a direct tax sale the previous year. That day, the two clergymen, the famous champion of slavery and the ardent abolitionist who claimed the former's family home, rode to church in the same carriage.¹

¹ Noll, *Civil War*, 45-46; "National Register of Historic Places: Inventory—Nomination Form: Tabby Manse (The Thomas Fuller House)," <http://www.nationalregister.sc.gov/beaufort/S10817707008/S10817707008.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2014); "Army, Navy, or Marine Land Certificate, No. 148," FFP; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:549. The Tabby Manse's current address is 1211 Bay Street, Beaufort, SC.

This had all the markings of the most awkward social situation of French's life, but it almost certainly was not. For one, French was both too smooth and too frank to squirm, and he was never at a loss for words. For another, Richard Fuller was not the same man who thirty years before justified slavery despite admitting abuses that called for Christian reform. For a third reason, the men were riding through the new heavens and new earth that the war had wrought. Fuller gazed at ground that he had not seen in years bursting with corn, cotton, and vegetables planted and in some cases owned by free blacks. French conducted worship and preached at the church in the morning and under the live-oaks at the freedpeople's new settlement of Saxtonville in the evening. Chase, who for the first time was seeing the land that his decisions had impacted so deeply, also made remarks at both meetings, as did Fuller. The venerable minister confessed to the hundreds of former slaves—some of them his own—that he believed that slavery was a sin and that despite his public arguments he was vexed within for as long as he had been a slaveowner. He admitted his efforts to colonize them and his failure to educate them as he taught that Christian masters were supposed to do. When Lincoln proclaimed emancipation, a friend estimated that Fuller had just lost 150 thousand dollars of property. Not so, Fuller replied: "It has taken 150,000 pounds from my conscience." Fuller told the freedmen that he wanted them to have the vote as soon as they could read a chapter of the Bible. Overcome with emotion, women broke into the ring shout on the spot.²

² Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:549; "From Rev. Wm. F. Russell," *American Missionary* 9, no. 7 (July 1865): 158-59; M[ansfield] French, *Address to Masters and Freedmen, by Rev. M. French, with Marriage Code for Freedmen, Instituted by the Freedmen's Bureau* (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke & Co., 1865), 21-22; Mansfield French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

The war—at least between conventional armies—was over, and although bitterness and fear ran deep in the South, for the moment the national mood turned toward reconciliation, and cathartic scenes of reunion and hope like this one played out all over the country. To Mansfield French, Richard Fuller’s moral conversion was exactly what the war was supposed to accomplish and was itself part of the millennium of peace and righteousness. In a mere matter of weeks the time of fiery judgment had ended and the time of tender mercy had begun. Like many Northerners, French’s attitude changed abruptly, reverting back to that of the 1861 publisher who, despite his fierce commitment to justice, was ready immediately to welcome Southern slaveowners with open arms if they returned penitently like the Prodigal Son.³ Now that the South was humbled, the time was ripe to build a new world where whites and blacks would walk and work side by side as equals and brothers.

French accompanied Chase and Fuller to the next stop on their tour, Savannah, Georgia, with orders from Generals Saxton and Gillmore to make a foray into the interior to articulate to whites and blacks the standards of the new era. From Savannah French traveled up the Savannah River to Augusta with John Emory Bryant, a pious army captain from Maine and now a Freedmen’s Bureau officer that French befriended two years before.⁴ In order to understand what French and Bryant found at Augusta, what they said, and what they intended to accomplish, it is necessary to sketch a general overview

³ See pp. 291-92.

⁴ French, “Light Breaking,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865. See letters from John Emory Bryant to M. French in October 1863, FFP; letters from Mansfield French in the John Emory Bryant Papers, 1855-1951 and undated, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

of conditions in the South, especially in Georgia, in the summer of 1865.

First, it was not universally accepted that slavery had ended despite the practical deterioration of the institution as the South dissolved into chaos in the latter part of the war. Many masters had a very difficult time reconciling themselves to the idea that emancipation was real. Some were not certain that the Emancipation Proclamation was legal and hoped that eventually the Supreme Court would overturn the edict, and they wanted to have their slaves still in their possession when this occurred. A group of white Georgians petitioned President Johnson to ameliorate the proclamation. Since it was a war measure, they questioned whether it applied in territory where Union boots had not marched before Johnson declared an end to hostilities. Moreover, if Southern state governments reentered the Union immediately and intact, they could block ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery. Therefore, some masters employed various subterfuges to withhold knowledge of emancipation from their slaves and keep them in bondage indefinitely. On some extremely remote plantations blacks remained ignorant of the new order and slavery with all its incidents continued for several years after 1865.⁵

However, slaves usually discovered the truth through their own communications grapevine. Some who made efforts to assert their independence were beaten in consequence, but many simply walked off the plantation to travel to freedom, as if it was a physical place. Many, perhaps most, freedpeople did not feel free until they left their

⁵ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 179-84; Paul A. Cimbala, *The Freedmen's Bureau: Reconstructing the American South after the Civil War*, The Anvil Series, Hans L. Trefousse, ed. (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2005), 10; French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

home. By walking somewhere else with their belongings on their backs—even if only to work at another plantation close by—they proved to themselves that their freedom was genuine. In Leon F. Litwack's words, "[M]any freedmen were acting on the assumption that to stay with their former masters," whether kind or harsh, "was to remain slaves." In some cases, the masters were especially desperate to keep them and the freedpeople were desperate to go. On French's trip to Augusta he saw clusters of blacks on the bluffs above the river waving to the boat, hoping to be taken aboard, many of them having flown from abusive masters who were not ready to give them up. One made his way to the steamboat on his own little craft, fell into the water trying to clamber aboard, and drowned.⁶

If freedom was indeed a place, that place was a city or large town where Federal troops were garrisoned. There blacks were certainly safer and also close to more of their own kind. Some blacks hoped to exchange plantation labor for a different type but were denied by white townspeople's steadfast refusal to employ them. They expected to be treated well by the Union Army and the Freedmen's Bureau, but they were often disappointed. Some Northern officers urged them to return to the plantations where they came from so that they would not starve, lose their money to exorbitant rents, and see their children lured into vice. Other Union officers in conjunction with municipal authorities passed strict vagrancy and curfew rules that were sometimes brutally enforced. Blacks who congregated in Georgia's cities were forced into overcrowded, squalid, unsanitary habitations because most of them had no money to rent rooms, and many landlords refused to rent rooms to blacks knowing that no white person would stay

⁶ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 179-84, 297-301; French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

there after a black renter left. In 1865-66 thousands died of disease. Hunger ran rampant among blacks and whites alike, which some towns overcame more quickly than others.⁷

No matter what privation, discomfort, sickness, and prejudice the new urban blacks endured, they felt more free in cities and towns in 1865 than they ever had on the plantation, and they flaunted it by violating every rule, substantive and symbolic, associated with slavery. Eric Foner writes,

Freedmen held mass meetings and religious services unrestrained by white surveillance, acquired dogs, guns, and liquor (all barred to them under slavery), and refused to yield the sidewalks to whites. They dressed as they pleased, black women sometimes wearing gaudy finery, carrying parasols, and replacing the slave kerchief with colorful hats and veils. In the summer of 1865, Charleston saw freedmen occupying “some of the best residences,” and promenading on King Street “arrayed in silks and satins of all the colors of the rainbow,” while black schoolchildren sang “ ‘John Brown's Body’ within ear-shot of Calhoun’s tomb.”

Individual behaviors like this were accompanied by collective action. Freedpeople assembled for an endless succession of parades and rallies that summer, elements of a remarkably sudden upsurge of political organization to demand full civil and voting rights.⁸

Prominently included in blacks’ agenda for social equality was ownership of Southern farmland. Foner points out that American blacks were as keenly aware as other New World emancipated peoples that land ownership was the key to whether legal freedom would prove to be a dead letter, and like them they quickly commenced a struggle to gain access to it. Blacks had several reasonable arguments for why they should and would be granted land of their own. First, if the federal government had the

⁷ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 310-22; Conway, *Reconstruction of Georgia*, 22-31, 67-68.

⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 98, 127.

right to seize slaves from their masters, it could do the same to the masters' land. Second, they believed that the land ought to belong to them because they alone had demonstrated the ability to work it. Third and most importantly—and a point strenuously argued by Mansfield French in the past—blacks claimed to have earned the land already by the sweat that they put into it and more broadly into the entire national economy. In the initial postwar anarchy, some blacks acted on these beliefs by temporarily taking possession of portions of their masters' lands, houses, tools, and livestock as their own. French discovered that a rumor was running wild among the freedpeople that the government would divide the planters' land among them around Christmas, and some were already appropriating their share.⁹

The freedpeople had various and mixed feelings about their former masters. Some wanted to get even. Some felt sorry for their former owners' destitution and suffering and sacrificed their own money and belongings to help them. Although many forgave their masters for the suffering they endured at their masters' hands, they did not forget. When speaking publicly, most were inclined to make slavery and their former masters sound better than they were, because they were still acutely conscious of how important it was to say whatever needed to be said to gain and keep whites' favor. Survival still depended on it.¹⁰

However, although certain white planters might remain mighty on this or that plantation or in a particular county, as a class they had been devastated by the war in

⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 121-22; Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 15, 1865, AMA 19403.

¹⁰ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 199-205.

every respect. Thousands of their sons were dead. Millions of dollars in wealth (in Confederate currency and slaves) were lost forever. In some cases their homes had been burnt to the ground and their fields were overgrown. There was so much to rebuild and so much that could never be rebuilt. Yet there was one thing still barely in their grasp that they were determined never to lose: supremacy over blacks by every measure. This produced a tense, winner-take-all contest between the races. Southern whites' attitudes toward blacks varied widely—French found that many planters wanted the best for freedpeople and repudiated secession—but virtually no white person ventured to show overt compassion and neighborliness toward blacks or for that matter toward Northern whites. Those who did were ostracized so completely that the rest dared not try. Some citizens tried to devise ways to make laws to keep slavery a practical fact if not a legal institution. A few even hired blacks to help them transport cotton to the coast only to abduct them and smuggle them to slaveholding countries to sell them there. Many whites asserted for the rest of their lives that blacks were fundamentally inferior and barely human and that any attempt to elevate them to the level of their superiors would result in bloody race war in which, after much white suffering, blacks would be exterminated.¹¹

Despite white planters' shaky position over blacks, however, the government and army of the United States were firmly positioned over whites, and the planters were painfully aware of it. In the immediate aftermath of the war abject Southerners showed considerable deference, real or feigned, to Union forces. Elites did not know if large-scale

¹¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 142-43; Conway, *Reconstruction of Georgia*, 62-66; Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 5, 1865, AMA 19403; "Freedmen's Aid Meeting," *Lowell Daily Courier*, clipping (3F31-013), FFP; "The Freedmen," clipping, FFP.

confiscation, steep fines, prison terms, some sort of permanent probation, or even the hangman's noose awaited them. With the sword of Damocles suspended above them, they had no small incentive to cooperate with the new order. But around the time that French proceeded to Augusta, Andrew Johnson displayed sudden magnanimity, issuing a sweeping amnesty to rebels that included restoration of all property except slaves. Certain categories of Confederates were excluded from the amnesty but could apply for pardon individually, and they generally received it. French and other radicals were deeply concerned. French warned,

Too much leniency shown to the ringleaders may prove to be both unkindness and injustice to the masses of the South and the people of the North. Saul committed the great error of sparing Agag of the Amalekites; but Samuel, the chief justice, tried him, and executed him to avert the wrath of the Lord [1 Samuel 15]. The government, like Saul, is now on trial before God, over the deposition of the great Southern Agag of the rebellion. The government is out of the furnace; it will soon show whether it has left its dross behind.

Radicals feared, with justification, that Johnson's mercy abruptly forfeited any chance to secure elites' cooperation in the reformation of the South. With the federal government's foot off its neck, the aristocracy resumed its struggle to safeguard its regional hegemony by means other than conventional warfare.¹²

Based on the example of the collapse of slavery in the Caribbean, Southern planters were convinced that the only way that wealth could be garnered from cash crops was by the plantation system; that the only way that system would continue was if whites could prevent blacks from being employed doing anything else, including working for

¹² Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 276-77; "The Freedmen," clipping, FFP; French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865; Michael Perman, *Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction: 1861-1868* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

themselves; and that the only way blacks could be compelled to work on plantations without the use of force was if whites maintained possession of all the land. Even a small number of independent black farmers would draw away enough laborers from white-owned plantations to undermine the whole system. Therefore, whites banded together not to sell or rent any property to any black man. Any blacks operating outside of white supervision and control not only threatened planters' economic dominance but their political dominance as well. Planters considered it unthinkable that an entire class with no taxable property would be made voters, so they strove to keep both land and crop ownership out of blacks' hands. French found that in one Georgia town white businessmen conspired to drive a black business owner under. It was equally unthinkable that a class of illiterates would be granted the suffrage, so whites exerted themselves to prevent education from taking root among freedpeople. The breadth of the boycott against black improvement was at times truly astonishing: in Milledgeville, Georgia, physicians made a pact not to treat any black patients.¹³

To augment these tactics, whites threatened and exercised outright violence against blacks. Some of the violence was preemptive retaliation for what whites were terrified that blacks were about to do to them. One of the age-old justifications Southerners had supplied for slavery was that under tight control blacks were happy and contented, but without it they would spontaneously rape and murder the white population. Fearful and threatened, Southern whites now expected a massacre to begin any day, and they saw signs of a conspiracy everywhere. Blacks' determination to claim whites' land

¹³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 146-48; "Meeting at Center Church," clipping, FFP; "The Freedmen," clipping, FFP; Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, October 24, 1865, AMA 16513.

elevated the tension considerably. French reported, “The citizens in some localities visited by me, have a fearful apprehension, that the freedmen, have a deep laid plot for an insurrection and slaughter.” French investigated these concerns among the freedpeople and found no cause for alarm, but his assurances did not satisfy white Georgians:

The people in some localities, informed me that they were prepared to defend themselves, and at the first indication of such rising among the freedmen, they would commence an indiscriminate slaughter . . . some false alarm may lead to the most serious consequences. Indeed, I learned with sorrow, that there were parties so wicked as to wink at such a sad event, as it would, in their opinion, turn to the discredit of the Government, and in justification of slavery.

French did not know it, but he was the first to connect white-on-black violence to rumors of a black insurrection to seize land by force around Christmas. These rumors spread like wildfire through the South and stimulated mounting mayhem as the year rolled on to an uprising that never occurred.¹⁴

Although the whites hated having Union soldiers in their midst, they saw them as their best defense against a black uprising and begged for troops to stay. Yet they also strenuously petitioned that black troops be withdrawn. Whites believed that when their former slaves saw men of their own color in uniform, it incited them to unrest. The greater provocation, however, was the black soldiers themselves. Whites North and South recognized that the military transformed black men’s demeanor and instilled in them confident self-respect. Many Northerners could not help but be impressed; Southerners hated and feared the change. Clad in the blue uniform of the United States these

¹⁴ Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 5, 1865, AMA 19403; Frederick A. Poomer et al. to John T. Croxton, August 4, 1865, AMA 19401; “Freedmen’s Aid Meeting,” *Lowell Daily Courier*, clipping (3F31-013), FFP; Dan T. Carter, “The Anatomy of Fear: The Christmas Day Insurrection Scare of 1865,” *Journal of Southern History* 42, no. 3 (August 1976): 345-64; Steven Hahn, “ ‘Extravagant Expectations’ of Freedom: Rumour, Political Struggle, and the Christmas Insurrection Scare of 1865 in the American South,” *Past and Present* 157, no. 4 (November 1997): 122-158.

presumptuous blacks were effectively immune from the humbling they deserved. Black civilians were not so fortunate. Foner cites a Freedmen's Bureau agent who judged that

“Southern whites . . . are quite indignant if they are not treated with the same deference that they were accustomed to” under slavery, and behavior that departed from the etiquette of antebellum race relations frequently provoked violence. Conduct deemed manly or dignified on the part of whites became examples of “insolence” and “insubordination” in the case of blacks.

Even French admitted that there were some black men whose newfound self-confidence blended with pent-up rage with the potential for terrible results. Yet far more often he learned in town after town of cases where blacks were, “on various pretexts, shot, flogged or mangled by dogs or otherwise abused, by planters, apparently as a deliberate gratification of their rage” or simply “because they refused to [acknowledge] the authority of their late masters.”¹⁵

In this dangerous situation, however, crops still needed to be grown for food and cash, and no one was quite sure how to do it apart from slavery. Whites and blacks eyed each other warily with incompatible agendas for the disposition of land, and the growing season was wasting away with little getting done. Some blacks who started working for wages found it less comfortable than they thought it would be. According to Alan Conway, at first blacks “were hired at nominal monthly wages which included board. Debts for clothing were to be worked off and with a little encouragement from the employers to go deeply into debt, the laborer could find himself in the position of continually trying to work off a debt which steadily grew larger.” Conversely, some

¹⁵ Frederick A. Poomer et al. to John T. Croxton, August 4, 1865, AMA 19401; Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 5, 1865, AMA 19403; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 136-38; “The Freedmen,” clipping, FFP; “Meeting at Center Church,” clipping, FFP.

whites found wage labor more beneficial than they had feared. French was gratified that some small-scale planters calculated that they could make more money by paying wages to blacks than by owning them. However, this was because emancipation enabled planters to divest themselves of lazy, untrustworthy workers and discharged their obligation to care for elderly, juvenile, and infirm dependents who could do little work. The way some masters responded to this opportunity—often with no small amount of bitterness—fed the social, humanitarian, and security crisis considerably. French found some planters “driving off the negroes” from their plantations, “threatening to shoot them if they return. As a result such negroes congregate, and as they must starve without food they will turn robbers. They will be a terror to all the region.” But while some planters tried every means to keep their slaves and while others drove them away, many planters were willing to give wage labor a chance only to find their slaves uncooperative. Not only were some freedpeople defiantly setting up for themselves on their former masters’ land, but others were willing to work for wages for anyone but their former owner, even if only at the plantation down the road.¹⁶

Therefore, white Southerners in 1865 were perplexed to the point of obsession over whether blacks would work. Southerners believed that blacks were lazy by nature, were incapable of planning or saving for the future, and would never defer gratification, and that therefore the only thing capable of making them work was the threat of the lash. In fact, there was a long history in both Europe and America of doubt over the

¹⁶ Conway, *Reconstruction of Georgia*, 106-7; French, “Light Breaking,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865; Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 196-98; Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 15, 1865, AMA 19403; Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 297-301.

willingness and ability of lower agricultural classes to labor; in the South the skepticism naturally fused with racism. A critical element of white Southerners' doubt, however, was not so much whether blacks would work, but whether blacks would work *for them*.

Whites failed to discern the difference and slurred a freedman's independent ambitions as laziness even while doing everything possible to keep those ambitions from fulfillment.¹⁷

With economic and social chaos all around and with the threat of both hunger and homelessness looming before the oncoming winter, agents of the new Freedmen's Bureau were dispersed by the government throughout the South to expound on the virtues and responsibilities of free labor and to mediate work agreements between white planters and black workers so as to restore order. In Georgia in 1865 there were roughly even numbers of whites and blacks, and despite the deep mutual mistrust, each group needed the other if for no other reason than economic and physical survival. So blacks appealed to Freedmen's Bureau officers for higher wages, and whites begged the Bureau to make blacks work for them. In French's judgment, "[i]n most instances harmonious and fair arrangements are being made, but a vast amount of suffering must ensue."¹⁸

That is what brought Freedmen's Bureau officer John Emory Bryant to Augusta in June 1865, and although French was not an officer of that agency, his established reputation for communicating persuasively with freedpeople caused him to be dispatched by General Quincy Gillmore also. After French returned from Augusta Gillmore sent him into the interior of South Carolina and Georgia for the same purpose about two weeks

¹⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 145-46.

¹⁸ Cimbala, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 33; Conway, *Reconstruction of Georgia*, 61-62; French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

later. French spoke again in Augusta at an electric Independence Day celebration, in which part of the 33rd Regiment, United States Colored Troops—formerly known as the 1st South Carolina Volunteers—led a procession of thousands of freedpeople through the streets. After visiting some other towns French was ordered to tour middle and southern Georgia by General James B. Steedman. In all, in July and the beginning of August French spoke in Edgefield, South Carolina and in the Georgia towns of

Washington, Atlanta, Columbus, Albany[,] Macon, and Milledgeville, as well as many smaller places. I have addressed, in the open air, twelve meetings of planters and freedmen, numbering from fifteen hundred to nearly four thousand persons at each meeting, and in all about forty thousand freedmen, also four meeting[s] composed of citizens exclusively.

French's trip to Washington, Georgia was particularly satisfying. He made much of the fact that native Robert Toombs, who before the war pronounced to the U.S. Senate that he would call the roll of his slaves at the Bunker Hill Monument in Massachusetts, was at the time a fugitive from justice. French reputedly announced emancipation to Toombs' slaves at Toombs' own plantation.¹⁹

French did not grasp all of the foregoing description of postwar Georgia at the beginning of his mission, of course, but the situation did become clear to him as the summer progressed. In time he developed a stump speech that he gave at each of his stops, which was published in September for distribution by the Freedmen's Bureau throughout the state. Entitled *An Address to Masters and Freedmen* attributed to "Dr. French" (as he was called by Georgia newspapers), French's speech was designed to

¹⁹ *Beaufort Tribune*, March 22, 1876; " 'Pilgrim' on His Pilgrimage," *Independent*, December 28, 1865; Mansfield French to J. B. Steedman, September 15, 1865, AMA 19403; *The Daily Intelligencer* (Atlanta, Ga.), August 5, 1865; "Dr. French's Address to the Freedmen," *The Daily Telegraph* (Macon, GA), August 10, 1865, clipping, FFP.

provide freed individuals with good advice for surviving the complex problems of their environment. The little book also included the official rules for marriage among freedpeople that Rufus Saxton designed for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, which will be discussed further in the next section.²⁰

French and Bureau personnel “were instructed to announce to both planters and freedmen in emphatic terms that the slaves were *all free* and *forever free*.” There was to be no doubt in the minds of Southerners white or black on this point. As French had told the refugees in Savannah earlier in the year, he declared that blacks’ freedom was the gift of God; the government had merely “proclaimed” it and the army had “brought” it. “Your Heavenly Father, and the Government of the United States, will henceforth stand between you and slavery,” he assured them. This was how French started every speech, to the great exultation of the freedpeople listening. He immediately derived a corollary from this revolutionary idea: counter to freedpeople’s assumptions, they did not have to leave their plantations in order to be free—they were free wherever they stayed and wherever they went.²¹

This had major implications for blacks’ living circumstances and survival for the rest of the year. French knew that many blacks were on the road to prove to themselves and to their masters that they truly were free. He also acknowledged that freedpeople’s first impulse upon emancipation was to find their family members who had been separated from them by sale, and he sympathized with them as he had when he saw

²⁰ M[ansfield] French, *Address to Masters and Freedmen*, by Rev. M. French, with *Marriage Code for Freedmen*, Instituted by the Freedmen’s Bureau (Macon, GA: J. W. Burke & Co., 1865).

²¹ French, “Light Breaking,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865; French, *Address*, 3.

contrabands doing the same at Port Royal three years earlier. French warned them, however, that at this time the practice was very dangerous to their survival and to the survival of the family members they were hoping to find. “I find along the railroads and public roads, and in the towns, large numbers of men, women and children who have left the plantations and their homes,” he said:

Many of them are without shelter, without food and worse than all, without friends. They have a dark prospect before them; and I must tell you that it is a serious matter at this time especially, to leave your masters and the plantations. Clothing, food and shelter you must all have for next winter, and you can obtain them, in most cases, only by remaining with your masters, and working on the plantations, at least till Christmas. . . . In view of the shortness of the crops, and the difficulty of getting new places for work, it is better, far better, that you remain with your former masters even though you get only your food and clothing. I would be glad you could get more, much more; and I advise you to get all you can; but however little they give you, that is better than nothing. If you are earning only a living, make no change until you are sure of another place as good, if not better. . . . Your old peck of hominy a week, even with hard work, is better than no work with an empty stomach.

French especially counseled men that their wives may already have signed contracts to work on another plantation for the rest of the year, that their former masters might not give permission for them to bring dependents onto the plantation, and that husbands might not yet have a house large enough to hold their dependents and the wherewithal to support them.²²

In this connection, French delineated responsibilities to men that were both challenging and dignifying. “I have heard complaints that some able-bodied men have left their families, refusing to support them,” French said. “No man having a family will have the right to spend his earnings on himself, and leave his helpless wife and children

²² Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 232-33; M. French to Oliver O. Howard, December 2, 1865, AMA 89446; French, *Address*, 8-11.

to be supported by his friends, or by the Government.” In fact, the Freedmen’s Bureau’s marital rules gave wives and children grounds to demand financial support, backed by the government. But French intended to make shame a more powerful deterrent than law: “He is not worthy to be called husband or father, who would do such a thing. . . . He . . . disgraces himself, wrongs his family and is an enemy to his race.” French acknowledged that in slavery freedmen’s masters were the true heads of household with the responsibility to feed and clothe the women and children that belonged to them. Therefore French described the responsibility to care for wives, children, and aged and disabled family members as a “luxury” that free men enjoyed. He also defined “love” to family members as the “support” of dependents, “to furnish them with all the comforts and conveniences that make life pleasant and useful.” French even bantered with the crowd about this. He told them that he heard from a planter that his former slave with a wife and five children abandoned them and would probably be in the crowd that day, and French wished he could dress him down to his face. A man in the crowd called out that he had a wife and five children and was steadfastly supporting them. “That is the man for me,” French called out; “that is noble; that is christian.” French addressed the women on this point as well, urging them to be sure of a man’s thriftiness, diligence, and responsibility before agreeing to marry him. Furthermore, she also had a role to play:

every wife should try to be worthy of his love, and make her society so agreeable to him, and her home so pleasant, that he will be more happy at home, than any where else. Be more loving and agreeable than any other woman can be, then he will not seek the company of any other woman. Men love quiet, tidy, happy homes, and smiling, loving wives.²³

²³ French, *Address*, 9-10; cf. Cott, *Public Vows*, 92-95.

French was endeavoring to form freedpeople into stable nuclear households of the middle-class type according to the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres. That meant that the father/husband was expected to be the sole breadwinner for the family. Practical necessity still forced many women to work, but black men took steps to limit how much their wives (and children) worked and thereby became economic mediators between their planter-employers and their families. Either way, a man's function in his household was now defined by work in the new era of wage labor. "The first duty that meets you, as you enter upon the broad table lands of freedom," French taught, "is your support, and the support of your families." French had greater confidence in blacks' willingness to work than did the hundreds of thousands who were perplexed by the question, but still he took no chances. He pointed out to the freedpeople that their late owners and many in the North believed that they could not and would not work, and lifting up blacks on the Sea Islands as an example, French dared them to prove their doubters wrong. This meant, practically, that they had to go back to work on plantations and sign contracts to work for wages. Some freedpeople, especially due to their illiteracy, were deeply suspicious of the labor contract as a backhanded ploy to entangle them in slavery once again. French explained that the Freedmen's Bureau was there to prevent that very thing. Every plantation labor contract was to be approved as fair by a Bureau agent, who could be appealed to if either side failed to abide by its terms. French stressed that the contract protected laborers from being exploited by the owner, that they should sign any contract that their employer was willing to sign first, that they should get all they could out of their negotiation but not to turn down the best offer their employer could give, and that

they must endure any unsatisfactory contract they sign to the end but should think twice before contracting with that employer the next year. In short, French gave his hearers a crash course in the free labor market. He may have been a good deal too generous toward the planters when he assured the freedpeople that their employers would never violate their contracts because “[a]ny honorable man would be ashamed to do such a thing. The whole community would frown upon him.”²⁴

French creatively addressed the unappealing features of freedom, as it was playing out, in the best possible light. For example, emancipation freed masters of their legal obligation to care for the aged, the debilitated, and orphans. French admitted that the freedpeople might believe that masters ought to continue that care, especially to those who had given their entire working lives to them. French candidly agreed. But in the practical reality that the planters would not, French exhorted the freedpeople from the example of the biblical exodus:

When Moses led Israel out of Egyptian bondage, Pharaoh proposed that the able-bodied men should go, leaving the women and children behind. Moses said, “No, we will go, and our wives and our little ones shall go also; our flocks and our herds; not a hoof shall be left behind.” Moses claimed his entire race or none. He took the burden of the whole people. . . . Do you now feel strong in your hearts, do you feel willing, yea anxious to bring with you into freedom, your aged fathers and mothers, with all the little ones to share with you its joys and its sorrows? Can you consent to enjoy the blessings of freedom alone, and leave them behind? Or will you in the spirit of Moses, take the burden of the support of your whole race?²⁵

A sorer subject was the ownership of the land. French knew that the freedpeople had “very high expectations” for their former masters’ land and livestock, and French

²⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 104; Gutman, *Black Family*, 244-46; French, *Address*, 3-4, 15-17.

²⁵ French, *Address*, 4.

frankly admitted that “some expectations . . . can not be realized.” Yet rather than dwell on that point he artfully portrayed the freedpeople as having made out far better than the planters, who had been devastated by the war:

What have you lost? *Only your chains*. What have you gained? Blessed be God, you have gained your freedom, and the freedom of all your race henceforth and forever. All that is left to your masters, is their plantations and their manly character. . . . Some of you may think that Providence has dealt more generously with them than with you. But look at it again. They have lost their independence, they have lost their money, they have lost all their negroes, and more than all, more than a hundred thousand graves are filled with beloved fathers, sons and brothers; and they would gladly give all that is left to them by the Government, if the graves would only give back their treasure; while you, having lost nothing, absolutely nothing worth naming, have gained a treasure in your freedom worth a life of toil and sacrifice. Whose condition is best? Who would exchange places with them? Every man and woman should feel that Providence has given them the best end of the bargain.

As a sort of consolation, the government allowed the planters to keep their land and livestock. Giving the blacks their freedom and nothing else “seems to place you out in the cold,” French acknowledged. But to the contrary, “[t]he Government has really complimented you in this. It has faith in you too, that you will make your freedom a success, so far as your support is concerned,” and it would provide the Freedmen’s Bureau for education, protection, and a limited degree of social welfare for the elderly and disabled.²⁶

French’s counsel here is a sharp contrast from just over a year before when he urged blacks on the Sea Islands to defend the land they preempted from reclamation with their hoe handles if necessary. The stark difference is noted by Reginald F. Hildebrand, who interprets French’s change as a regression to the “mainstream of Methodist

²⁶ French, *Address*, 5-6.

Episcopal discourse on economic reform” as a result of the fierce criticism he endured for his earlier radicalism. Hildebrand can be forgiven for drawing conclusions with relatively little knowledge of French’s whole story. In fact, French had by no means given up getting land for blacks at his own considerable risk, as will be seen below.²⁷ His very different counsel to blacks in the interior in 1865 is best explained by the results of his activism over preemption the previous year. French learned the hard way that when a government employee, even one with friends in high places, contradicts the orders of the President and Congress, he loses, and so does everyone who follows him. French was not about to tilt at windmills and mislead Georgia’s freedpeople as he had South Carolina’s. Instead, he was looking for ways to give blacks the best possible advantages in a system in which he had little leverage.²⁸

As for the freedpeople’s homelessness, French assured his audiences that if they were to “compel [masters] now, by your good conduct and usefulness, to value you more, and do more for you, in freedom,” and if they carefully laid some of their earnings aside in a savings bank, “then you will have no trouble in getting comfortable, pleasant homes.” There was plenty of government land out West and in Florida for homesteaders who could get themselves there and improve the soil. “If you have good character and a

²⁷ See pp. 455-72.

²⁸ Reginald F. Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 101-2. Hildebrand seems to make the (not uncommon) mistake of confusing 1865 and 1965. He appropriately calls the tonic of “discipline, morality, education, opportunity, and the franchise” “classical liberal” dogma, but on the same page he calls it “a social gospel” (one anachronism) “that was often conventional and conservative” (a second). He also wonders why Methodists did not enjoin “disruptive collective actions like strikes or sit-ins.” In 1965 such actions that aroused the hostility of local authorities were protected by a sympathetic federal government. In 1865 Federal troops would likely have taken the side of the local authorities and crushed the demonstrators if marches and rallies had turned into economic disruption or civil unrest.

plenty of greenbacks in your pockets,” French proclaimed, “the white people will be happy to sell you lands, houses, horses, mules, cows, and every thing else you need.” French did not yet realize that this sunny forecast was utterly wrong.²⁹

As always, French was deeply concerned about blacks’ personal conduct, which he believed to be critical to their survival. Undoubtedly their welfare among irascible white neighbors depended heavily on their comportment in whites’ presence. French did not advise blacks to be deferential or subordinate, but he did counsel them to go out of their way to be kind and respectful, characteristically painting the picture in the most appealing terms possible:

Of some, I have heard it said, they have become impudent and offensive, in their manners, to their former masters and mistresses since entering freedom. How can this possibly be? Were you polite and respectful to masters and mistresses in slavery, and was it only to escape the whip? . . . I can not believe this to be true. If more rough and impolite now, is not that a reason for your slavery, rather than freedom? Were I in *your* place, I would, if possible, be more respectful . . . I would *compel* them to say, that I had improved, greatly improved, by my freedom.

Likewise French encouraged the freedpeople not to put all their weight on Northerners for help and guidance, because someday those counselors would return home. Instead, blacks should ask their former masters for advice. French insisted that there should no longer be “antagonism” between the two groups, because they had the same interests, and the success of each depended on the other. He was perplexed by “[t]his mysterious silence, this gulf between you and them,” which “must be bridged over.” If blacks asked planters for counsel, blacks would learn much and planters would be honored and conciliated. Similarly, when black workers chose to leave their old master’s plantation for

²⁹ French, *Address*, 7-8, 20-21.

greener pastures, French urged them to avoid hard words and not “run off in the night.” They might need to look for work there again, and their master might even offer better wages than before if they did not burn the bridge.³⁰

Yet the larger danger in bad conduct was provoking the wrath of God. Again, the blacks’ Israelite “ancestors” were the exemplar:

The Jews, on coming out of Egypt, thought it a very nice thing to copy the sins of their old masters. . . . Foolish people! God, who heard their groans and set them free, was displeased with them, and He ordered three thousand to be stoned to death. Again, they gave themselves up to licentiousness, to gratifying their lusts . . . they dishonored themselves and displeased God, and His judgments fell upon them, destroying the lives of thousands.

French’s concern about blacks’ sexual purity was especially acute, in part because so many in the North and veritably all the whites in the South thought the worst of blacks in this regard. He spoke against fornication and adultery in the strongest possible terms and put at least as much stress on husbands’ obligation to guard their wives and fathers’ obligation to guard their daughters as on women to keep themselves honorable. French knew well freedmen’s bitterness over their impotence to perform this duty when they were slaves. He also commanded freedpeople not to steal, including stealing time from their employer and their coworkers by slacking off work. Lying, swearing, and drunkenness he also sternly prohibited, shrewdly pointing out that a black man “cannot afford to do it; he has too much at stake.”³¹

French did not “think all, who come into freedom, will make a success of it.” In fact, he said he would be happy with an eighty percent success rate. “Thousands, and

³⁰ French, *Address*, 11-13.

³¹ French, *Address*, 13-15. Cf. Paul the Apostle’s employment of Israel’s post-exodus journey through the wilderness as a basis for moral instruction in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13.

thousands of those, who came out of Egypt, by their follies, idleness, jealousy, murmuring under restraint, and their idolatrous propensities, provoked God to destroy them.” Therefore, French urged,

Do not be alarmed then, when you see one failing here or another there; or if some of your brethren who have no spirit, no enterprise, go and whine around their old masters, begging them to take them back into slavery again and take care of them. Some of the children of Israel before they had even crossed the Red Sea, proposed to go back again into the brick yards and bondage of Egypt [Exodus 14:11-12]. Let every failure put new life into you. If thy brother faint under his burthens, be thou more of a man thyself; and let none of your own little blunders or mistakes discourage you. When you fail and stumble, up and try again and again, and be determined to succeed any how.

In a refreshing and anomalous echo of his revivalist days, French admitted that

while I exhort and pray you to break off from all former sins, I must tell you, that you can not do it in your own strength. Only by the grace of God helping you, will you be able to break off from your sins, and live right. Seek that grace, then, for God says to one, to all, ‘As thy day is, so thy strength shall be’ [Deuteronomy 33:25].”³²

French concluded his address with a sober warning. Blacks were “on probation, on your good behavior. Whether you do well, get homes here, and make useful citizens, will depend on yourselves.” If they failed in “the stern battle of life, the white people will crowd you out.” Yet French believed they would succeed. He also reminded them that “[t]he white people are on probation too, as regards their treatment of you.” He admitted that many “seem to dislike you” (to put it mildly) and wished them expelled from the land if they were not to be slaves. Even the government itself was on trial. But “[n]either you nor the [white] people can get out of the hands of God. Please Him, and all will be well. Displease Him, and it will be easy for Him to make you as thorns in each other’s

³² French, *Address*, 4-5, 15.

sides [Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:3].”³³

French and his message were received euphorically by the freedpeople wherever he went. John Emory Bryant wrote that after the benediction was given at their first meeting in Augusta, the black audience “could hold in no longer” and began to celebrate ecstatically. “It was a wild thrilling sight. I wish you could have seen it. . . . It does my soul good to witness their joy. They almost consider Mr. French and myself their deliverors and wherever we go they all want to shake hands with us. . . .” French was, quite simply, a peerlessly effective motivational speaker to black people. The part of his speech that freedpeople heard most clearly was the unequivocal word that they were forever free. They also were likely awed by French’s fantastic tales of the prosperity of blacks on the Sea Islands over the previous three years—in crucial respects a grossly unfair comparison, partly due to modest access to land at Port Royal and more importantly because there was no categorically hostile native white populace there.³⁴

French’s reception among whites in Georgia was mixed. Some were, to say the least, tepid toward him, like the standoffish reporter at the first Augusta rally who wrote, “If similar meetings occur, and a guard be at hand to preserve decorum, we have no objection to recording sentiments that may be uttered—as a part of the history of the times.” One can only imagine the thoughts of white listeners in southwestern Georgia when French offered a theodicy for Sherman’s march to the sea. In a hamhanded effort at conciliation, French argued that God in his mercy persuaded Ulysses S. Grant to direct

³³ French, *Address*, 23.

³⁴ John Emory Bryant to Emma Bryant, May 29, 1865, John Emory Bryant Papers, quoted in Ruth Currie-McDaniel, *Carpetbagger of Conscience: A Biography of John Emory Bryant* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 50; French, *Address*, 17-22.

Sherman to destroy Georgia's homes and fields so that Grant would not have to kill all of the state's sons in the Army of Northern Virginia. In fact, French went on, Georgians should thank God for his mercy, because they had their men back and could rebuild what was destroyed. Aside from this ghastly faux pas, however, many of the white planters who stood at the fringes of the freedpeople's mass meetings were surprised and pleased by what French said. His reputation had led them to fear the worst, but they were impressed, and they hoped that blacks would follow his advice. Planters were quite relieved that French directed freedpeople back to their home plantations to sign labor contracts and remain faithful to their commitments. They thoroughly approved of his exhortations to blacks to be diligent and to show respect to their former masters. Planters in one town were gratified that French asked them for advice on the subject of blacks' labor and conduct in order to demonstrate that his motives were genuine. In consequence, French's published address included a prodigious sequence of enthusiastic endorsements by Georgia newspapers like the *Columbus Sentinel*, which pronounced his counsel to freedpeople "eminently sound, conservative and timely. . . . He dispelled the delusions that are alluring many of them into habits of idleness and mischievous expectations."³⁵

What was happening is obvious in hindsight: blacks and whites both loved French because each side heard what they wanted to hear—indeed, as in many a marriage counseling session, each heard most loudly what was meant for the ears of the other. Paradoxically, French's admonitions to blacks about personal conduct pacified whites

³⁵ "Meeting of Freedmen," *Augusta Transcript*, June 2, 1865; "Sherman's Torch vs. Grant's Sword," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 15, 1865; "Dr. French's Address to the Freedmen," *The Daily Telegraph*, August 10, 1865, clipping, FFP. Endorsements are found in French, *Address* and separately in FFP (3F31-033).

when blacks showed them respect, but they enraged the same whites when blacks acted as their moral equals. Some whites, meanwhile, found nothing praiseworthy about French. James T. Bacon, editor of the *Edgefield (S.C.) Advertiser*, opined that the next time French spoke there he had better “keep a general at his side and soldiers at his back, for on Friday last, nothing on earth but the fear of being bayonnetted or thrown into prison, kept us from hurling a stone at his head. Perhaps on some future occasion, the indignation of some outraged Southern man will cause him to forget both bayonet and prison.”³⁶ When French’s travels were over, he testified that his armed guards had preserved his life, and he concluded that Southern whites would pick up weapons and fight for their independence again the moment they were given the opportunity.³⁷

Eric Foner incisively analyzes the uncomprehending optimism of Freedmen’s Bureau officials, to which French was a sort of adjunct in the summer of 1865. An axiom of free labor was that a laborer who worked hard had the opportunity to advance in his place of employment, save money, acquire productive property himself, and achieve a measure of independence. For this reason, Bureau agents continually preached the value of hard work and held out shining hope to the freedmen that they could be wealthy farmers someday soon if they went back to the plantation. But the principle did not apply to an impoverished setting devastated by war, disastrous weather, and insect swarms, where laborers’ wages barely sustained life, and where landowners refused to sell to workers no matter how much money they were offered and no matter how badly the

³⁶ Vernon Burton, “Race and Reconstruction: Edgefield County, South Carolina,” *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 1 (Fall 1978): 33-34. Bacon’s editorial remarks earned him a two-week jail term in Charleston.

³⁷“Meeting at Center Church,” clipping, FFP.

owners needed it. “Even as planters sought to limit the freedom of the former slaves in every way possible, and blacks understood that they lived ‘in the midst of enemies to our race,’ ” Foner writes, “Bureau agents held fast to the conviction that ‘the interests of capital and labor are identical.’ . . . In fact, however, the South’s ‘labor problem’ arose not from misunderstanding, but from the irreconcilable interests of former masters and former slaves as each sought to define the meaning of emancipation.” Foner overstates his case a bit when he claims that Bureau agents persisted in misapprehending “the depths of racial antagonism and class conflict in the postwar South”; in ensuing years those depths became quite apparent, at least to Mansfield French.³⁸ Yet Foner is quite right that French and the Bureau offered an economic solution to what was at root a noneconomic problem: the mutually exclusive objectives of a race determined to win complete recognition of its full humanity and a race equally determined not to yield an inch of its inherent superiority. Whatever good French’s tours and speech accomplished—and they probably did reduce incidences of violence and the scope of starvation—his efforts and those of his colleagues were wholly inadequate to defuse the high-stakes competition between the races spreading over the South and the attitudes of the heart that fueled it.³⁹

The Freedmen’s Bureau and Defeat in the Third Battle

While French was traveling through Georgia in August he was honorably discharged from the United States Volunteers as the government gradually disbanded its

³⁸ See p. 494.

³⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 168-69, 182.

vast army. After writing a report to General James B. Steedman from Augusta on September 5, French traveled to New York to spend time with his wife. He was a civilian again and free to move on with his life, but he chose not to. General Quincy Gillmore, in command in South Carolina and coastal Georgia and Florida, and General Steedman in inland Georgia petitioned President Johnson to retain French because of the valuable services that he rendered over the summer. General Edward A. Wild, the Freedmen's Bureau's assistant commissioner for Georgia, was equally grateful for French's accomplishments and asked Secretary Stanton to make French an "Inspector" for his state; he urged that French be on hand to encourage blacks and whites to remain peaceable and orderly at the chaos expected to break out at Christmas. Johnson consented, and French returned to Washington to be commissioned an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau. On October 28, 1865 he was mustered back in as a chaplain, once again with a nominal assignment, this time to minister to the spiritual needs of the 136th U.S. Colored Troops. French was invested in the fate of the freedpeople of the South, and he was not done striving on their behalf.⁴⁰

The Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands (its official name) was the brainchild of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission that toured the Union-occupied South at Secretary of War Stanton's behest in 1863. Congress created the agency within the War Department in March 1865 with the vocal support of the humanitarian-inclined segment of the Northern population, including, prominently, the

⁴⁰ C. H. Bridges to Mansfield Joseph French, May 14, 1931, FFP; endorsements of *Address*, FFP (3F31-033); Mansfield French to Oliver O. Howard, December 2, 1865, AMA 89446; Edward A. Wild to Edwin M. Stanton, date unknown (1865), FFP.

Methodist Episcopal Church, which put a number of clergy and laymen into its ranks.

The Bureau was viewed as a temporary—*very* temporary—support to blacks to assist them into long-term, productive, self-supporting labor.⁴¹

The Freedmen's Bureau's "responsibilities can only be described as daunting," writes Eric Foner:

they included introducing a workable system of free labor in the South, establishing schools for the freedmen, providing aid to the destitute, aged, ill, and insane, adjudicating disputes among blacks and between the races, and attempting to secure for blacks and white Unionists equal justice from the state and local governments established during Presidential Reconstruction. In turn diplomat, marriage counselor, educator, supervisor of labor contracts, sheriff, judge, and jury, the local Bureau agent was expected to win the confidence of blacks and whites alike in a situation where race and labor relations had been poisoned by mutual distrust and conflicting interests.

Moreover, the Bureau was expected to accomplish this wide array of impossible tasks with a mere nine hundred agents at its peak spread across the entire South.⁴²

Some historians, sympathetic to the Freedmen's Bureau's purported aim of assisting blacks into full freedom, have criticized its performance as mainly tending to assist planters in securing a compliant labor force. As French exemplified, Bureau agents never lost a chance to preach to freedmen that they had to work or else they would starve. They urged blacks to trust their former masters and go to work for them in order to get the economy going again and for workers' own survival. While some Bureau officers were personally committed to the well-being of the freedpeople and heroically exerted

⁴¹ See pp. 346-47; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 181-88; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 267-69; William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, rev. ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 310-11; Walter W. Benjamin and Leland Scott, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the Postwar Era," in Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., *The History of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 2:362.

⁴² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 155-56.

themselves on their behalf, others were simply doing a job with little concept of what rights freedpeople had besides what their landlord-employers prescribed. Agents had the added temptation to side with the planters in order to cultivate good will in an otherwise hostile white society. Beleaguered, overworked agents could be prone to view any black complainant as an idle troublemaker who simply needed to be told to go back to work.⁴³

However, if the Bureau was truly such a helpful handmaid to the planters, why were Southern whites chafing at it and bent on its dissolution? Simply put, the Bureau's economic benefit to the planters paled before the noneconomic damage it did to their agenda to entrench white supremacy. The Bureau's exclusive authority to validate labor contracts and power to enforce them were a constant reminder to white and black alike that a planter's dominion on his estates was not absolute but was subject to the government of the United States—exactly what the Southern elite seceded and waged a war in order to avoid. Worse still, it granted blacks the status of legal equality with whites in contract negotiations.⁴⁴

French, then, was joining a government institution in the South whose stated purpose for blacks' uplift was entirely in line with his own but whose profile raised the ire of whites all over the region. In Charleston, the hotbed of secession, Rufus Saxton reported that individuals loyal to the Union were "treated with entire neglect, and, so far as my experience goes, with discourtesy. My wife has seldom walked the streets of Charleston without being insulted. I, myself, have seldom passed through the streets

⁴³ Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 379-86.

⁴⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 180-81.

without receiving, from man or woman, indignities.” Saxton concluded from the testimonies of teachers in schools for blacks and Freedmen’s Bureau officers that they would be “assassinated” without the protection of Federal troops.⁴⁵

Upon being commissioned with this intimidating assignment, however, French did not immediately report for duty. Instead, he spent November lecturing in New England and New York about his experiences in Georgia for the purpose of raising money for humanitarian aid for the freedpeople before the rapidly approaching winter. For the first time, French encountered a bit of donor fatigue. Before the war, the idea of the government doing aid work was a foreign concept, so voluntary organizations quickly jumped in. Now that the government had gotten into the game, however, there was suspicion and lack of clarity as to whose responsibility the suffering freedpeople were. A reporter for the *Lowell (Mass.) Daily Courier* thought highly of French’s sincerity and effort, “But we cannot resist the conviction that there is a sad lack of efficiency and energy in the administration of the Freedmen’s Bureau . . . when there is confiscated property enough for all such purposes. . . .” This journalist, like many in the North, was unaware of how the Johnson administration’s policies were deploying confiscated properties very differently, which will be seen below, but he also did not grasp that the Freedmen’s Bureau was intentionally doing as little as possible to help the poor with food, clothing, and shelter. The Bureau was a child of its era, and its commissioner, General Oliver O. Howard, feared that those who received charity would immediately depend on it and cease working to support themselves. Howard constantly tried to deflect

⁴⁵ Fessenden, *Report*, 2:218.

continual criticism that the Bureau encouraged blacks to be lazy. The chaotic conditions of 1865 and awful crop failures in successive years made it impossible for the Bureau to cut off rations altogether, but its aid was austere enough to require private philanthropy to meet the freedpeople's needs.⁴⁶

French estimated that ninety thousand would die of starvation or exposure in the winter of 1865-66 in Georgia and Alabama alone. "The great fact needs to be held up continually," French urged,

not only before the Government, but before the whole public, that the Government has taken four millions of freedmen out of the prisonhouse of Slavery, where they were cared for according to the cruel mercies of the institution, and placed them on the high table-lands of freedom, without *one foot of land*; with no house to shelter them; without one penny in their pockets &, as a general thing, they are left in the presence of ~~enemies, or, at least among~~ those, who have little, or no sympathy for them, however, much they might have had, when they owned them as slaves. They are turned out loose by the Government upon the public commons of the world.

Despite the ebullient optimism he displayed to the freedpeople in public, among Northern whites French exhorted that the former slaves

must have food when hungry; clothes, when naked; houses, when it storms, and medicines, when sick. The [white] people of the South, in their exhausted condition, can hardly meet their own present wants. Now these are *stubborn, undeniable facts*. To demand of the freedmen, under these circumstances that they take care of themselves, is, Pharaohlike, to require bricks, without straw [Exodus 5].

French believed that the government had a critical role to provide the legal and economic foundation for the freedpeople's long-term flourishing, but he wanted the church to wade

⁴⁶ M. J. French to M. French, October 25, 1865, FFP; George Lansing Taylor, "The Perishing Freedmen," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 23, 1865; "General City News," *New York Times*, November 11, 1865; Mansfield French to George Whipple, November 25, 1865, AMA 9280; "Ashmun Institute," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, December 7, 1865; "Freedmen's Aid Meeting," *Lowell Daily Courier* clipping (3F31-013), FFP; "Meeting at Center Church," clipping, FFP; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 164-65.

into the fray and take care of the blacks' educational and humanitarian needs itself. He exhorted the American Missionary Association that

[t]he Cross must now come into the field. Its standard bearers, must be legions, & no faltering. Moral forces must have the entire battleground. A ministry full of faith & the Holy Ghost acknowledging the manhood & citizenship of the freedmen must be sent forth. Schools must be opened *rapidly*, & *especially* in the *interior*. The white young men & young women of the South cannot for a long time to come, be induced to teach colored children. We can readily see therefore what the friends in the North have to do for the poor freedmen. I hope your association will ask, & expect great things of God, & of the public, for it shall be unto you according to your faith [Matthew 9:29]. Why has God prospered the businessmen of the North during the war, if not that they might pour out their wealth for the good of the poor freedmen?⁴⁷

While French was urging on Northern philanthropy, he took steps to gain influence with new authority figures in Washington such as the commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, Oliver Otis Howard. The thirty-five-year-old Mainer lost an arm in McClellan's 1862 Peninsular Campaign, turned in a questionable performance as a corps commander at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg in 1863, and rebounded by adeptly commanding the right wing of Sherman's army in 1864-65. Howard was also a devout evangelical known as "the Christian general," and uniquely among Sherman's officers he thought well of Rufus Saxton. Howard and French, therefore, had common ground on which French attempted to build a relationship akin to his friendship with Salmon P. Chase. As early as June French introduced himself by letter:

I desire to express to you, my gratitude to a kind Providence, who has placed you in charge of so many of the very important interests of the freedmen. I pray that you may be endowed with wisdom for the great work, & that you may be able to find men *preeminently* fitted to aid you, without *marring* the work. . . . Men of weak faith in God, or who cannot do this work *heartily as unto the Lord* [Colossians 3:23], are very apt to soon grow weary of it. The cross of the colored

⁴⁷ "The Freedmen," clipping, FFP; Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, October 24, 1865, AMA 16513.

man's cause, is not without its odium, true christian love & a certain amount of courage, are requisite, or not only will the cause suffer, but the *laborer* himself will sustain *moral damage*, as has too often occurred.⁴⁸

Naturally, French had some opinions about suitable and unsuitable workers that he was eager to share with Howard. General Cuvier Grover, whom French called “the favorite of all the disloyalists” and an opponent of the freedpeople, was “relieved of the command of Savannah, by Gen. Gillmore,” and French asked Howard to cooperate with Stanton and “other friends” to ensure that Grover was assigned to duty elsewhere. In December on his way South to begin his job at the Bureau, French wrote to Howard on several other matters: refugees in Georgia from other states, planting schools in the interior using abandoned Confederate government buildings, the disposition of land on the Sea Islands, the potential for confiscation of the lands of high officials in the Confederate government, and the prospects for organizing the Republican Party in the South. French wrote Howard “not so much as a *general* [but] as a *christian*. I thank God, the Bureau has a head, who recognizes God in all things, and may he sustain and use you to his glory.”⁴⁹

Howard, however, was not as friendly as other authorities that French supplicated; the general heard reports from conservative critics that caused him to regard French with suspicion. Yet French had friends who interceded for him: General Clinton B. Fisk, a Methodist layman and assistant commissioner of the Bureau in Kentucky and Tennessee

⁴⁸ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 269; Hitchcock, *Marching with Sherman*, 226-27; Mansfield French to Oliver Otis Howard, June 14, 1865, Oliver Otis Howard Collection, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME.

⁴⁹ Mansfield French to Oliver Otis Howard, June 14, 1865, Oliver Otis Howard Collection; Mansfield French to Oliver O. Howard, December 2, 1865, AMA 89446.

with whom French shared a stage at a lecture in New York in November, and General Charles Henry Howard, the commissioner's brother who was stationed in South Carolina. Although French and O. O. Howard were never close, Howard was eventually convinced of French's worthiness and by 1867 spoke of him in glowing terms.⁵⁰

French arrived in Savannah on December 13 with orders to report to the assistant commissioner of the Bureau for Georgia. However, Johnson had replaced the abolitionist General Wild with the conservative General Davis Tillson, who had heard of French, wanted nothing to do with him, and maligned him to Howard. To rescue French from limbo, Rufus Saxton, now the Bureau's assistant commissioner for South Carolina, summoned French to assist him yet again. French immediately accompanied Saxton on a trip to speak to planters and freedpeople about their new relationship in Florence and in Sumter, returning to Charleston in time to speak at a rousing "Emancipation Jubilee" that over ten thousand freedpeople attended on January 1, 1866. Two days later the two men spoke to blacks in the state capital of Columbia. It seems that South Carolina did not have someone like French to explain the new order as he had in Georgia—race relations and economic disorder were as bad in the Palmetto State as they had been in Georgia six months before, if not worse.⁵¹

⁵⁰ John Emory Bryant to M. French, January 5, 1866, FFP; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 310; "General City News," *New York Times*, November 11, 1865; "The Freedmen," clipping, FFP; Clinton B. Fisk to M. French, December 22, 1865, FFP; Mansfield French to Oliver Otis Howard, December 20, 1865, Oliver Otis Howard Collection; John W. Forney to M. French, April 22, 1867, FFP.

⁵¹ "New Appointment—A Suggestion," *The National Republican* (Savannah, Ga.), December 15, 1865; John Emory Bryant to M. French, January 5, 1866, FFP; Mansfield French to Oliver Otis Howard, December 20, 1865, Oliver Otis Howard Collection; M. French, "Letter from the South," *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1866; Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First Days amongst the Contrabands* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1893), 204-5; "Remarks to the Freedmen," *South Carolina Leader*, January 22, 1866; "Addresses," FFP (3F18-018-019).

French did not remain with Saxton for long, however, because by the middle of January the general was relieved of duty as the Bureau's assistant commissioner for South Carolina. The tale of Saxton's dismissal and replacement requires telling even though French took but little part in it, because it defined the terms of French's advocacy for the freedpeople for the rest of his sojourn in the South.

Andrew Johnson, who had risen to the presidency from humble beginnings as a tailor in eastern Tennessee, was a staunch Unionist who exhibited his unstinting loyalty to the national government during the war as a U.S. senator and as a stern military governor of his home state before taking office as vice president for Lincoln's second term. His presence on the ticket reflected the Republican Party's temporary 1864 name change to the "National Union Party." Johnson was a Democrat more bent on victory over the Confederacy than almost all the rest of his party, yet like other loyal Democrats he remained an unshakable believer in "the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was." Now that the Confederate government and its armies were no more, Johnson was keen to see life go back to normal. He resisted the idea that the cataclysm had permanently altered what "normal" meant.⁵²

The 1865 Freedmen's Bureau Act gave the new agency power to settle freedpeople on their own plots on lands that had been confiscated by the government during the war. Though the total amount of confiscated land was far too small to give every black household a farm, even that available land was abruptly taken off the table, because when Johnson issued his amnesty to most Confederates, he also restored to them

⁵² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 188-90.

the lands they abandoned including, in principle, what had been legally confiscated. As the summer progressed, it became clear that Southern land sold in the tax sales was to remain in the possession of its new owners. However, the “possessory titles” issued to freedpeople along the Atlantic coast according to Sherman’s Special Field Order Number 15 were a different story. On July 28, 1865 Howard directed assistant commissioners in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida to return to owners any land that had not officially been declared abandoned, although if any enterprising freedman happened to be growing crops on that land, he retained ownership of the crop. However, Howard’s order did not include plots in the Sherman tract that freedpeople had settled, because Howard could not believe that the president intended to annul titles issued under Sherman’s orders, backed up by the Freedmen’s Bureau Act, and to evict freedpeople from their new farms. Moreover, in accordance with the law, Howard directed the assistant commissioners in the region to set aside land without delay that they deemed necessary for the immediate well-being of freedpeople for their rental or purchase. In effect, Howard and Saxton (who was responsible to oversee resettlement in the Sherman territory) hoped to settle the entire tract with freedpeople before returning Confederates could reclaim their land and petition Johnson for its restoration. Many owners were already asking Saxton for their property where freedpeople had settled, and Saxton was putting them off.⁵³

In September, however, Johnson drew up an explicit plan for the Sherman territory that crushed Howard and Saxton’s hopes. Johnson specified that lands that were

⁵³ Oliver Otis Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General, United States Army* (New York: Baker and Taylor, 1907), 229-35; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 276-77; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 320-21.

confiscated but not yet sold were to be returned to their owners if the owners paid the back tax. Moreover, the understaffed Freedmen's Bureau had to show proof that a federal court declared property to have been abandoned due to disloyalty in order for it to count as "confiscated." Therefore, all land seized by executive order instead of judicial decree—essentially all the land under Special Order Number 15—had to be returned. The government, especially Secretary of War Stanton, had intentionally kept this land out of direct tax sales so that it was available to be distributed to freedmen under the terms of the Freedmen's Bureau Act. Now all of it was exposed to restoration and all the freedpeople farming it to eviction. The only compensation that Johnson conceded to current occupants was ownership of currently growing crops. Howard asked Johnson to add a stipulation to the pardons he was granting to require landowners to transfer five to ten acres of land to the head of each slave family living on their property. Johnson refused.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, some abolitionists were already uneasy about Johnson since his amnesty order, which the president considered to be a simple continuation of Lincoln's irenic reconstruction policy. Johnson said that he believed that the franchise should be extended to at least some blacks—literate and veterans—but he considered that to be for the states to legislate after they were readmitted to the Union, not as a condition of readmission. Johnson abruptly declared North Carolina and Mississippi to be reconstructed as soon as a majority of qualified white voters took an oath of future loyalty to the Union. Abolitionists were terrified that these governments would force

⁵⁴ Howard, *Autobiography*, 235-37; Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction 1863-1869* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1974), 249-50.

blacks into permanent peonage and be dominated by the types that brought on secession. When restored Southern leaders inevitably made alliance with Northern Democrats, radical Republicans feared, national politics would revert to the Southern conservative stranglehold where it lay in the decades before the war. Meanwhile, disturbing reports of widespread violence against blacks, like French's testimony in the fall of 1865, were spreading northward. Some Northerners began worrying that perhaps the rebellion had not been quashed after all and that Johnson's leniency had given it a new lease on life.⁵⁵

It was under these circumstances—apparent retreat from the promise of the Freedmen's Bureau Act, hunger and helplessness among vagrant freedpeople, and escalating white-on-black violence—that French visited President Johnson in Washington on October 24, 1865 a few days before he was mustered into the Bureau. French had devised a plan to settle a hundred thousand of "the surplus laborers of the South, among the Freedmen, with their families" to government-owned land in central and south Florida, "giving all, *free transportations*, and to each family a tent and rations, when necessary for two or three months." French believed that that undeveloped land had rich potential especially for naval stores—specifically, live-oak lumber for shipbuilding, tar, and turpentine—as well as for sugarcane, cotton, indigo, citrus, and vegetables. Freedpeople who settled there and developed the land for five years could claim it as their own under the terms of the Homestead Act. French also appealed for investment capital from sympathetic Northern businessmen to build sawmills and ovens for the production of turpentine and tar to give freedpeople paying jobs for the first year. As

⁵⁵ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 314-22, 332.

French saw it, everybody would win: the country would get expanded productive land, the investors a healthy return, Southerners and the occupying army would have fewer unemployed, hungry vagrants to worry about, and above all the freedpeople would get a chance at economic self-sufficiency—and not a single Confederate would be displaced.⁵⁶

French won over several Washington officials to his plan, most notably Secretary of the Interior James Harlan. (Harlan was a fellow Methodist—in fact, the former president of Iowa Wesleyan University—whose wife had accompanied the initial relief effort at Port Royal.) When Harlan and French visited Johnson to get his approval, the president listened carefully. Despite all the uncertainty around Johnson's late actions toward former Confederates and their land, French left "satisfied . . . fully that the freedmen have *nothing to fear & much to hope for*, from the President." What French did not know was that Johnson had an unusual way of convincing petitioners that he agreed with them by keeping silence when in fact his agenda was entirely his own. For at about the time that Johnson relieved French's fears, Howard was on his way to the Sea Islands on Johnson's orders to secure "an agreement mutually satisfactory to the freedmen and the land owners" that resulted in the owners getting their land back and the freedpeople being dispossessed. The freedmen, betrayed by government promises once again, were distraught when they heard Howard's reluctant announcement. They submitted to losing title to their lands, but they refused to work for their former owners, desiring to rent the lands they worked instead. Howard composed a board made up of landowners, freedmen, and government officials to settle labor disputes overseen by French's young colleague

⁵⁶ Mansfield French to James B. Steedman, September 5, 1865, AMA 19403; M. French to Albion P. Howe, October 23, 1865, FFP.

A. P. Ketchum. Landowners were not allowed to evict those currently living on the land if they were willing to rent or sign a one-year contract to work for wages, and they were not to interfere with existing or new schools for freedmen.⁵⁷

French was aghast at Johnson's policy. "Was the action of the government toward these freedmen made in *good faith*?" he asked in the *Christian Advocate* in January 1866:

So the freedmen regarded it, and they acted accordingly. Is it then honorable, is it just, in the sight of God or man, for the government now to draw back? Would not the South despise, and have occasion to distrust, a government that should thus break faith with its *true* friends? Let the government beware how it resets the broken chains of the bondmen upon them, since God, not man, broke them off, and that, too, at our earnest entreaty, to save us from a nation's grave.

Abolitionists were divided over what to make of Andrew Johnson. Some were hostile to him almost from the beginning. Others still trusted him. Many like French were somewhere in the middle—deeply concerned about the path he was taking but still hopeful he would change his mind.⁵⁸

It took very little time, however, for the president to alienate abolitionists once and for all. In February 1866 Congress passed a bill to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau that enjoyed support from radical and moderate Republicans alike. To everyone's surprise, Johnson vetoed the bill, and he communicated his disapproval with the most shocking message possible. Rather than criticize individual features of the law that might be fixed for resubmission, Johnson denounced the Bureau in toto, "voic[ing] themes,"

⁵⁷ M. French to Albion P. Howe, October 23, 1865, FFP; Niven, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 3:146, 148 n. 6; Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, October 24, 1865, AMA 16513; Howard, *Autobiography*, 237-40; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 278-81. French first wrote to then-Senator Harlan with plenty of advice on impending Reconstruction in January 1865; see James Harlan to M. French, January 31, 1865, FFP.

⁵⁸ French, "Letter from the South," *Christian Advocate*, January 25, 1866; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 339-40.

according to Eric Foner, “that to this day have sustained opposition to federal intervention on behalf of blacks.” Johnson pilloried the Freedmen’s Bureau as an unconstitutional, unaffordable, unfair (as it made the government take actions for the welfare of blacks that it had never done for “our people”), and irresponsible patronage machine that encouraged blacks not to work for a living. If that was not enough, Johnson picked a much bigger fight. In December 1865 representatives and senators from former Confederate states arrived in Washington for the new legislative session, and an uncomfortable Congress exercised its constitutional power to regulate its own membership by choosing not to seat the ex-rebels until the terms of reconstruction were clear and satisfactory to majorities of its houses. In Johnson’s veto message, he asserted that Congress had no legitimacy making any law that affected states not represented in its chambers and that therefore Johnson alone as the representative of the whole nation had the authority to determine the contours of Reconstruction.⁵⁹

As the last prominent Jacksonian Democrat in American politics, Johnson stood on sincerely held principles (and to an extent affected *Old Hickory’s* style), but he also hoped to gain a political advantage. A prospect for party realignment hung teasingly in the air, and Johnson, who feared that radical Republicans were bent on deposing him, hoped to form a new political base of moderates, Northern Democrats, and Southerners. He thought that he could use the freedpeople issue to drive a wedge between radicals and moderates. He was profoundly wrong. Moderate Republicans were alarmed by Johnson’s reconstruction policy, his callousness toward freedpeople, his boorish and self-involved

⁵⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 256-57.

manners—he publicly implied that certain eminent abolitionists wanted to assassinate him—and above all his denial of congressional authority. When Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Bill soon afterward, moderates joined with radicals to override the president’s veto. Both sides of the conflict understood that these actions set the pattern of governance moving forward. The track was laid for perhaps the most titanic struggle between a president and Congress in American history.⁶⁰

Just before this confrontation, at about the turn of the year, Johnson began purging key military officers in the South whom he believed to be allies of his congressional adversaries. Thus Edward A. Wild of the Freedmen’s Bureau in Georgia was replaced by Davis Tillson; Quincy Gillmore, commander of the Department of South Carolina, was replaced by Daniel E. Sickles; and Rufus Saxton was replaced in the Freedmen’s Bureau in South Carolina by Robert K. Scott. In 1865 Saxton had refused to return possession of land occupied by freedpeople under Special Order Number 15 to its former owners. In his mind, General Sherman’s order was “as binding as a statute.” So while French was persuading freedpeople in Georgia to accept that their masters’ real estate would not be theirs, Saxton was once again defying his commander-in-chief’s orders. Again Saxton was defeated, and this time he was leaving South Carolina for good, believing his removal to be the result of pressure on Johnson from the state’s secessionist old guard.⁶¹

The freedpeople of South Carolina, grieved at the imminent departure of their faithful and beloved benefactor, feted Saxton with a week of laudatory meetings. At the

⁶⁰ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 257-60.

⁶¹ Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 250; Cimbala, *Freedmen’s Bureau*, 14-15; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 278, 282; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 409; Fessenden, *Report*, II:217.

final meeting the crowd called for French to speak. “In all his labors I have tried to help him, to hold up his hands, as did Aaron the hands of Moses,” French said, unknowingly but appropriately affirming Major Henry Hitchcock’s scornful appellation of the year before.⁶² But French cautioned the people not to regard Saxton too highly:

[H]owever much reason you may have to love, and feel grateful to, the General, and the Government too . . . you must remember that your Heavenly Father has wrought out your deliverance from the house of bondage. He can do more for you than a thousand generals, or, even the Government itself. He is *with* you, and *for* you still. The people, who had for forty years looked to, and leaned upon Moses, in all their trials, were, no doubt, greatly cast down when God relieved him of the great charge and told the angels to hide him away in the mountain, where the people should see him no more. But God raised up another leader in Joshua, who took the work where Moses left it and carried it on to the end [Deuteronomy 34].

You must never forget, however hard or discouraging the way may be at times, that God is your deliverer and keeper. If sad, because friends, on whom you have leaned, are taken away, look upward and take heart, for the cloudy pillar still hangs over you [Exodus 13:21-22; Numbers 9:15-23]. Trust then in God, do right, and your best too, in everything, and in due time the capstone in the great temple of your future, as a useful, intelligent and respected people in South Carolina, the United States, and in the great family of nations, shall “be brought forth with shoutings of, Grace, grace unto it” [Zechariah 4:7].⁶³

Missions and Marriage Relations

When Saxton departed, French was still technically assigned to report to Davis Tillson in Georgia, who was still happy not to see him. John Emory Bryant, who was chafing under Tillson’s supervision, urged French to resign from the Bureau and edit a Republican newspaper for freedpeople in Augusta. Yet Robert K. Scott somehow acquired a high opinion of French, so when he arrived in Charleston to succeed Saxton he immediately countermanded French’s orders and appointed him to his own staff to gain

⁶² See pp. 330-31; also Exodus 17:12.

⁶³ “Remarks to the Freedmen,” *South Carolina Leader*, January 22, 1866.

“the benefit of [French’s] experience.” Johnson appointed Scott in order to put a figure friendlier to his administration in charge of the Bureau’s affairs in South Carolina, but Scott, though not the renegade that Saxton could be, proved to be more progressive than Johnson must have expected. French described him thus:

He has great executive ability & remarkable firmness & is withal a *practical* man. He comprehends his work & will try to do it irrespective of favor or frown. . . . He is not a Christian man, but is a moral man, & has been raised, he says, a Methodist. No profane language or whiskey passes his lips.

The two men enjoyed a working relationship as friendly and cooperative as French had with Saxton.⁶⁴

French received the title of “Superintendent of Missions and Marriage Relations,” which to some extent paralleled what he had done on Saxton’s staff at Beaufort. This was French’s formal responsibility for all of 1866 and 1867; this section describes what the job entailed.⁶⁵

French’s oversight of freedpeople’s “marriage relations” stems from the general guidelines Oliver Otis Howard issued to his assistant commissioners on May 30, 1865, which included the following:

The unity of families, and all the rights of the family relation, will be carefully guarded. In places where the local statutes make no provisions for the marriage of persons of color, the assistant commissioners are authorized to designate officers who shall keep a record of marriages, which may be solemnized by any ordained minister of the Gospel, who shall make a return of the same, with such items as may be required for registration at places designated by the assistant commissioner. Registrations already made by United States officers will be carefully preserved.

⁶⁴ John Emory Bryant to M. French, letters of January 5, February 17, and June 15, 1866, FFP; Mansfield French to George Whipple, January 29, 1866, AMA H5923.

⁶⁵ General Orders, No. 2, FFP (3F31-010).

French was the new marriage registrar for South Carolina.⁶⁶

Assistant commissioners had considerable latitude as to how they applied Howard's guidelines in their respective territories, including his orders about marriage. In August 1865, Rufus Saxton issued marriage rules for South Carolina and coastal Georgia and Florida that expanded the rules that he had issued in consultation with French in 1862. Basic features remained the same: couples married by custom required legal solemnization and certification, and polygamy, adultery, and unmarried cohabitation were still strictly forbidden. As noted earlier, the black church joined whites to rail against all three sins, but many blacks remained comfortable with premarital sex until a child's conception demanded marriage. Saxton's rules expanded the definition of legal solemnizers of marriage to include churches and their pastors, and he included more directions on how to dissolve a marriage legally. The main change in the rules, however, was a large increase in the complex guidelines for sorting out whose spouse was whose, which was no small headache for Bureau officers in the aftermath of slavery. The woman that a male slave was living with when freedom came was not always the woman that he wanted or that a Bureau official thought was the right one, especially if the man had other wives and children elsewhere to support. In many cases after being sold away from his or her (non-legal) spouse, a slave married another and might be faced with a gut-wrenching situation when the freedperson discovered that his or her former beloved was still alive. In some cases the second marriage was not chosen but was imposed by a master. Worst of all, indifferent state governments, including South Carolina's, usually declared couples

⁶⁶ Cimbala, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 122; Laura Josephine Webster, "The Operation of the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina," *Smith College Studies in History* 1, nos. 2-3 (January-April 1916): 118.

cohabiting at the time of emancipation to be legally married regardless of the desires, moral interests, or dependents of the parties. Federal officials like Saxton and French overrode state law to allow for more careful determinations of who were legal spouses, being especially sensitive to the support of children. Indeed, Saxton's rules gave former wives, quasi-wives, and children robust rights to claim support and inheritance even if the woman did not end up being legally married to the man after the sorting process.⁶⁷

Most freedpeople rejoiced at Bureau officials' command to stop cohabiting and got married eagerly. French claimed

that with scarcely an exception, they expressed, immediately, in obtaining their freedom, most devout thanks that they could, henceforth, not only live in the marriage state, but that they could care for their children, as they believed God required. . . . [T]hey were, with few exceptions, impatient to be exonerated from all obligations to every companion save one, and such one only, as could be regarded as lawfully wedded for life.

Many blacks agreed with white instructors like French that their marriages-by-custom were not morally adequate, but freedpeople frequently got married for other reasons as enumerated by Herbert Gutman: "to legitimize their children, to qualify for soldiers' pensions, to share in the rumored forthcoming division of the lands, and to exercise their newly won civil rights." Nancy Cott observes,

Being freed from bondage, ex-slaves were also to be freed from their inability to consent and make contracts. Freedom to consent would enable them to be employed and to marry legally. The labor contract and the marriage contract—choice of work and choice of spouse—were parallel in many minds, both privileges and attributes of the free American.

⁶⁷ Reginald Washington, "Sealing the Sacred Bonds of Holy Matrimony: Freedmen's Bureau Marriage Records," *Prologue* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2005), <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/spring/freedman-marriage-recs.html> (accessed September 26, 2014); see pp. 277-79 above; "General Orders, No. 8: Marriage Rules" in French, *Address*; M. French to Robert K. Scott, November 6, 1866, FFP; Cott, *Public Vows*, 85-88, 91-92; Gutman, *Black Family*, 240-44, 418-20; Litwack, *Been in the Storm*, 232-35.

As French recognized from the beginning, the right to marry constituted legal acknowledgment of the full, authentic humanity and maturity of blacks and implied their equality with whites. This truth—together with his equally ardent concerns for biblically correct conduct before a judging God and for the welfare of women, children, and the elderly—was a major motivation for French’s relentless campaign for marriage solemnization. It was also a major motivation for blacks to marry and for Southern whites to resist and subvert it. Planters who by buying and selling slaves had done so much to frustrate their marital fidelity angrily mocked what they saw as blacks’ mindless attempt to ape their betters. Prohibiting blacks from marrying, if possible, was yet another element of the white boycott against black elevation. “[W]hite southerners were recognizing the civil rights manifest in marriage by refusing to grant them,” writes Cott. “Freedpeople’s embrace of marriage privileges recognized the same thing.”⁶⁸

After taking his new job, French tweaked and reorganized Saxton’s marriage rules, lowering the legal marriage age and providing for the formation of a commission to augment the functions of clergy and churches in seeing to marriage solemnization and dissolution. French encouraged Howard to make marriage rules uniform throughout the Bureau, including the appointment of superintendents of freedpeople’s marriages like himself in every state, perhaps with a general superintendent in Washington to oversee them. Howard took a quite different approach. Always with an eye to concluding the Bureau’s assignment as quickly as possible, he directed assistant commissioners in March 1866 to draw up marriage rules compatible with the laws in their respective states that

⁶⁸ M. French to Robert K. Scott, November 6, 1866, FFP; Cott, *Public Vows*, 81, 88-95; Gutman, *Black Family*, 240-41, 413-18.

would meet the “formal approval” of state governors. In South Carolina this had the calamitous effect of nullifying Saxton and French’s rules when Governor James Orr insisted in May that they contradicted the state law that pronounced all couples cohabiting at emancipation to be legally married. Orr conceded the legality of marriages solemnized under Bureau rules since the end of the war, and he granted that a man was responsible for the support of all of his offspring, whether of his legal spouse or not. Yet any freedpeople who had not resolved their marital situation before that point were now bound to the relationships that they had in the spring of 1865, even if they had since broken them off. General Scott had his orders from Howard, and in June 1866 he swept aside Saxton and French’s rules in favor of Orr’s. French protested eloquently, but to no avail.⁶⁹

If French’s role in “marriage relations” for the Freedmen’s Bureau is fairly clear, the definition of his responsibility for “missions” is murky. French stated that he was “appointed to look after the religious instruction . . . of the freedmen of South Carolina.” Practically, this seems to have had to do with religious efforts made by Northern churches and missionary societies among freedpeople, including preaching, setting up churches, and converting churches that had been confiscated by the Federal government for freedpeople’s use. This last issue pertained to a little known aspect of the Union reconquest of the South. The progressing wave of Federal control disrupted much in its

⁶⁹ Marriage Rules, General Order No. 14; Other Records (National Archives Microfilm Publication M869, roll 44); Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of South Carolina, 1865-1870; Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105; National Archives Building; Washington, DC; <http://freedmensbureau.com/southcarolina/marriagerules.htm> (accessed August 22, 2014); M. French to Oliver O. Howard, January 22, 1866, FFP; Oliver O. Howard, Circular Letter, March 2, 1866, FFP; James L. Orr to Robert K. Scott, May 22, 1866, FFP.

path, including churches, whose buildings were in some cases abandoned. Bishop Edward R. Ames of the Methodist Episcopal Church saw an opportunity to extend his church's ministry into the territory of the now-rebellious Methodist Episcopal Church, South. At Ames' request, Edwin M. Stanton issued orders to Union commanders to turn over to Ames all buildings of the Southern church "in which a loyal minister, who has been appointed by a loyal Bishop of said Church does not officiate." Stanton gave similar orders that privileged Northern Baptists and Presbyterians. This expansive grant not only gave Northern denominations access to abandoned churches but also authorized the removal of Southern preachers within Union lines (all of whom were appointed by bishops still "disloyal") and the wholesale confiscation of church property, perhaps permanently. When Lincoln learned of the order he curtailed its scope—it potentially dispossessed the Southern church's holdings in loyal states—and it was never fully implemented, but there were still enough open pulpits to justify a stream of Northern missionaries to the South. The Methodist Episcopal Church exerted significant energy and its characteristic organizational aptitude to take advantage of the opportunity.⁷⁰

When the war ended, many issues remained unclear, including relations between the Northern and Southern halves of the three denominations that had been rent over slavery—namely, the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians. Some Northerners believed that reunion could and should commence at once. French was one of them. On

⁷⁰ M. French to James B. Steedman and Joseph S. Fullerton, May 16, 1866, FFP; Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 244; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 295; James W. May, "The War Years," in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:247-51. Several of the Methodist bishops associated with this initiative had close ties to the Holiness Movement; see Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Evangelicalism 1, Donald W. Dayton and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 150 n. 3.

his first trip to Augusta in June 1865, French was surprised by how much sympathy he felt for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South upon seeing his brethren's distraught condition—much of the church's property confiscated under Stanton's order and its printing presses silent. French "became convinced that the M. E. Church, South, can be brought back into the same relation as before the separation." He reasoned that the Northern church had no more abolitionists because there was no more slavery and that the Southern church had lost all slaveholders and slaves after already having purged all references to slavery from its *Discipline* after the split in 1844-45. Once the Northern church followed suit with its *Discipline*, nothing more would stand in the way. French hoped that each half would send ministers to the other section so as to cement their bond. He believed that it was the more imperative to reunite for the sake of the freedpeople: if the Southern church would accede to the full "manhood and citizenship" of blacks, and if Southerners were accepted by Northerners as equal partners, the mission for blacks' souls would be vastly helped.⁷¹

That, of course, was the rub: Southern Methodists were not prepared to accept racial equality, and therefore despite the collapse of slavery, there were still "abolitionists" in the Northern church, like Mansfield French. And despite the outcome of the war, some Northerners doubted that Southern Methodists sincerely repudiated slavery and rebellion. Southern Unionists who were drawn to the Methodist Episcopal Church during the war were downright hostile towards reunion. Still others thought that reunion was a moot point, because in a desolated land without money the Methodist Episcopal

⁷¹ French, "Light Breaking," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

Church, South would shrivel up and die. In fact, Southern denominations did not die but vigorously protested Northern ecclesiastical imperialism. Southern ministers who expressed interest in joining the Northern church balked at confessing their sin of rebellion against the government, which the church required of them. For the Methodist Episcopal Church, then, the agenda was set for expanded missionary work in the former Confederacy through the formation of “mission conferences” in Southern states.⁷²

A major component of Northern Methodists’ motivation was the religious condition of blacks both in and outside the Southern church. Between white Southern Methodists who sanctioned slavery and newly arrived white Northern Methodists accompanying the Union armies of liberation, black Methodists’ affinity was clear, much to the shocked and disappointed pain of their erstwhile white brethren. Blacks knew that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had no plans to grant them equality in it. Importantly, given the highly connective Methodist polity, the Methodist Episcopal Church sanctioned and incorporated black-organized and -led congregations, granting their ministers full rank with whites. Equally importantly, the Northern church offered black Methodists money to purchase land, build buildings, and launch schools of all levels. That denomination was not alone, however. Despite its superior wealth, numbers, and organizational strength, the Methodist Episcopal Church competed for freedpeople with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church,

⁷² Hildebrand, *Times Were Strange*, 83-85; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 295-96, 308; Charles T. Thrift, Jr., “Rebuilding the Southern Church,” in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:263; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 56-58.

Zion, and the new, homegrown Colored Methodist Episcopal Church.⁷³

French's role in the Freedmen's Bureau in South Carolina involved facilitating the acquisition of government-owned church property by independent black churches and the Northern denominations with missions to freedpeople. It also involved resisting efforts by displaced whites to get their buildings back. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South had three buildings in Charleston before the war, reclaimed two when it ended, and petitioned President Johnson for the third, which was located in the heart of the black part of town and even before the war had far more black members than whites. French knew that if the whites took it over, the blacks would refuse to worship with them and would be left without a building, so he wrote one of his superiors to see that it be kept in government hands. In another case, French helped connect the dots between a group of black Baptists and the Methodist Episcopal Church. The black portion of Charleston's Wentworth Street Baptist Church withdrew after emancipation and was using a Southern Methodist building until that denomination took it back and evicted them. Wentworth Street's white Baptists—probably due to a mixture of both generosity and desperation—sold their building at a low price to their former fellow-members. Three fifths of the blacks' money for purchase came from the Northern Methodist church, and the new congregation was promptly dedicated the Wentworth Street Methodist Episcopal Church. At the dedication service, French took up an offering to pay off a temporary loan borrowed by the church in

⁷³ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 94; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 312-15; May, "War Years," in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:255.

the course of the transfer.⁷⁴

Speakers at the dedication gloried in the vision of a new race-blind church. Alonzo Webster of Vermont, who preached the dedication sermon, proclaimed that “this is not a white man’s country nor a black man’s country—a white man’s church nor a black man’s church; but it is the people’s country, and the Christian’s church, without respect to color, caste or condition.” Webster applied New Testament references to the integration of Gentiles into Israel through Christ, such as Ephesians 2:19, to black Christians’ integration with whites: “now therefore they are no more aliens and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Another preacher used the Apostle Peter’s reluctant recognition that God had sanctified Gentiles as a parallel to the present: “Another partition wall had lately fallen, and the voice of God speaking through the stern logic of events, has commanded us, that what God has cleansed we should no longer call common or unclean [Acts 10:15, 28].” French agreed with these sentiments with every fiber of his being. A group of avant-garde “anticaste radicals” was developing in the Methodist Episcopal Church that included French, his son-in-law George Lansing Taylor,⁷⁵ and most prominently Bishop Gilbert Haven. They insisted, in keeping with the revivalist and perfectionist belief in total, instantaneous personal change, that it demanded a correspondingly radical ecclesiastical change—namely, immediate racial integration at all levels of the denomination. French urged the church to

⁷⁴ Mansfield French to Robert K. Scott?, March 16, 1866; enclosed in “Instructions to the Generals commanding Departments in relation to aiding and supporting Rev. Bishop Ames”; W-1007; 1863; M619, roll 0228; “Letter from Charleston, S. C.,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 9, 1866. According to the description in this article, the Wentworth Street church is today’s Centenary United Methodist Church in Charleston. French preached there on August 18, 1867; see M. French to A. French, August 19, 1867, FFP.

⁷⁵ See pp. 557-59.

come south and appeal to blacks with “ ‘Negro Ecclesiastical Suffrage’ emblazoned on her banners”; he expected that blacks would not “stop short of a seat on the bench of bishops.” Anticaste radicals like French believed that the church was obligated to take the lead on racial integration in order to set the example for the rest of the country.⁷⁶

French was, however, concerned that his church would fall short of the requirement. There was no significant controversy in the Methodist Episcopal Church over incorporating black congregations and ordaining black ministers—which, it should be noted, was an unprecedented step—but there was a distinct hesitancy to sit under black preaching or to place black ministers in authority over white class leaders, lay preachers, or traveling ministers. French complained, “It is said [the General Conference of 1864] threw up a causeway between the two priesthoods, allowing passage only one way from us to them. That having blotted out the distinction of bond and free, the Conference was willing that of Barbarian and Scythian should remain [Colossians 3:11].” French was referring to the General Conference’s decision to establish “mission conferences” in the areas it was capturing in the South, under which were incorporated, in its words, “*colored pastorates for colored people*,” although white ministers could be appointed to them if they desired. French did desire it, and when the South Carolina Mission Conference was formed at the beginning of April 1866, he exulted at being readmitted to the traveling connection for the first time in seven years “[t]o mount the ‘old itinerant war-horse of Methodism’ in South Carolina and ride him over its ‘sunny

⁷⁶ “Letter from Charleston, S. C.,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 9, 1866; *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 13, 1865, quoted in Hildebrand, *Times Were Strange*, 86-87, 158 n. 35.

plains.’ And then again to have alongside some ‘black riders’ such as Paul had.”⁷⁷

Contrary to the hopes of integration advocates like French, however, integrated Methodist Episcopal congregations never formed in the South, because after slavery whites would not join churches with a large fraction of black membership. There were integrated conferences composed of monoracial congregations for a number of years, but they maintained an uncomfortable existence despite the efforts of the indomitable Bishop Haven. (The South Carolina Conference was integrated in principle but almost entirely black in reality.) In 1876, just months after French’s death and months before Rutherford B. Hayes’ election ended Reconstruction, the General Conference gave annual conferences permission to divide along racial lines, and they rapidly did so. On the matter of an integrated church, French and Haven—the latter of whom even championed racial intermarriage—proved to be very far ahead of their time.⁷⁸

Philanthropic Investment: The Fourth Battle for Land

As always, French’s activities were not confined to his stated responsibilities. Although door after door had closed on the freedpeople’s wish for their own plots of land, French was not shaken from his conviction that property ownership was a fundamental element of God’s plan to bring blacks out of slavery. “The first provision made by God for the freedmen of Egypt, was *homesteads*,” he wrote. “His commissary of subsistence

⁷⁷ French, “Omens in Southern Skies,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 3, 1864; see pp. 385-86 above; May, “War Years,” in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:252-53; D. P. Leavitt, “Our Work in the South,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, April 18, 1866. French’s reference to Paul’s “black riders” is obscure; he may have been thinking of “Simeon that was called Niger,” a prophet/teacher at the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

⁷⁸ Hildebrand, *Times Were Strange*, 108-17.

was kept open till the homesteads were gained. They lie at the very foundation of the freedmen's elevation. The friends should not rest till they have *first, lands, second, schools. All the rest must follow*, if the Government & the church [respectively] do their duty." With the government less friendly to this aim than ever under Andrew Johnson, French sought out ways that private enterprise might provide blacks with productive property.⁷⁹

French's 1865 proposal to settle freedpeople in Florida has already been mentioned.⁸⁰ A key element of his plan was private investment in naval stores production that would enable black homesteaders to survive the first year. In 1866 Representative George Julian turned the core of French's plan into law in the form of the Southern Homestead Act, which gave blacks and loyal Southern whites a head start staking claims until 1867, but the results of the legislation fell far short of its sponsor's hopes. Over the decade-long life of the law, 67,600 claims were registered. Forty-one percent resulted in land titles. Twenty to twenty-five percent of claimants—about four thousand families—were black. Although blacks' success rate was similar to that of whites, this was only a tiny fraction of the freedpeople who wanted land. Without the free public transportation and initial private investment in basic manufacturing and infrastructure that French tried and failed to pull together, most were simply too poor to get to their new homesteads and survive, much less afford seed, animals, and farming implements. To make matters worse, governmental administration of the program (such as drawing up proper surveys)

⁷⁹ Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, October 24, 1865, AMA 16513.

⁸⁰ See pp. 438-39.

lagged behind demand, and some plots turned out to be worthless and unimprovable.

Most of the land went to agents for lumber companies.⁸¹

Another scheme that French got involved with was the American Land Company and Agency, whose president was French's friend, former Massachusetts governor John A. Andrew. The purpose of the company was to pool money from Northern investors to purchase land from desperate Southern planters at a low price, which would give planters the capital to restart operations on their remaining land. The company, meanwhile, sold some of its land at a sizable markup to Northern operators, thereby gaining a return on investment, and the rest at cost in small plots to freedmen to whom Southern landowners refused to sell directly. It was another attempt at a win for all parties, and French was interested. Soon after the company formed French wrote to Andrew asking him to buy land in Georgia. The company did business for two years, but substantial crop failures in 1866—particularly on the Tennessee cotton plantations where the company invested much of its initial capital—did much to bankrupt it, although some similar efforts on a smaller scale had a degree of success.⁸²

In the spring of 1866 French pursued another win-win opportunity, and this time, fatefully, he was one of the parties who expected to profit from it. At a plantation fifty miles outside of Charleston, a planter named William Hannehan made a contract with his black workers that was approved by the Freedmen's Bureau. After he made the contract, however, he could not deliver on it, presumably as to the terms for paying cash wages

⁸¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 255; Cimbala, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 60-61.

⁸² McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 412-13; Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts 1861-1865* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1904), 2:267-69; M. French to John A. Andrew, November 6, 1866, FFP.

through the growing season until the crop was divided between the owner and the workers at the harvest (a common contract structure at the time). Worse, Hannehan fell deathly ill. His wife cast about for someone who would infuse cash into the operation and found no one. Some other local whites appealed to French on her behalf. Foreseeing the destitution of both the black workers and the planter family if the arrangement were to break down and recognizing an opportunity for his own gain, French agreed to advance 750 dollars into the enterprise in exchange for a quarter of Hannehan's share of the crop after the division at harvest time. French's superior, Robert K. Scott, approved and even encouraged French to make the investment. Another Bureau officer, Lieutenant L. J. Lott, also capitalized Hannehan's plantation in the same amount.⁸³

The Hannehan deal is a perfect—and ultimately the most explosive—example of what Major Henry Hitchcock perceived in 1865: namely, French's propensity to make an arrangement with the potential for his own profit while he was serving as a public employee, with the result that even if there was no malfeasance or illegality, "it looks bad." In addition, it is likely that French borrowed the money for the investment, extending his trail of complicated financial obligations. Even Austa saw the peril and urged her husband to get out of the agreement—citing, in addition to his "embarrassment," the dicey chances of profit, his liability to be taken advantage of by black workers due to his tenderheartedness, and the likelihood of dispute between himself and Mrs. Hannehan—but to no avail. French himself should have known better; three years earlier he wrote,

⁸³ M. French to James B. Steedman and Joseph S. Fullerton, May 14, 1866, FFP; A. French to M. French, March 19, 1866, FFP; A. French to M. French, March 26, 1866, FFP; "Affairs in the South," *New York Times*, June 13, 1866.

“I cannot have any pecuniary transactions without great risk of reputation & then my influence is gone. I am here *to do good, & not to make money*.”⁸⁴

French was by no means alone in his obtuseness; a startling number of honest public servants in that period seemed amazingly unaware of their entanglements in conflicts of interest. This is not to mention the many who were after pelf by whatever fraudulent means they could devise. The postwar years have a reputation for egregious corruption. Through his studies of nineteenth-century profiteering, Mark Wahlgren Summers maintains that corruption was no worse after the Civil War than before it. After the war, however, corruption *as a political issue* was far more prominent than ever before due to a constellation of factors, a few of which ensnared Mansfield French between 1866 and 1868.⁸⁵

In 1866 the principal factor was Andrew Johnson’s animosity toward the Freedmen’s Bureau. After Congress narrowly failed to overturn Johnson’s veto of the legislation to extend the Bureau’s life in February, Republicans began working on a form of the bill that could gain a veto-proof majority. Johnson did not remain idle but competed hard to keep congressmen on his side by commissioning a cadre of allies to give him—and more importantly the reading public—as much dirt on the Bureau as they could find. The most eminent investigators were two generals. The junior partner was Joseph S. Fullerton, most recently the callous assistant commissioner for the Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana who “closed the black orphan asylum, apprenticed the inmates to

⁸⁴ See pp. 330-31, 337-38 above; A. French to M. French, March 19, 1866, FFP; M. French to W. French, February 16, 1863, FFP.

⁸⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 462; Mark W. Summers, *The Era of Good Stealings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), x-xi.

white masters, and ordered the arrest as ‘idlers and vagrants’ of all New Orleans blacks who lacked written evidence of employment.” The senior partner was James B. Steedman, the commander who had been pleased enough with French’s service in Georgia to ask Johnson to employ him in the Bureau.⁸⁶

Steedman and Fullerton went looking for as much corruption and incompetence in the Bureau as they could find. A South Carolina planter questioned by the generals told French that “Steedman remarked to him that the Bureau was a humbug, that he intended to blow it up, & that he could have found out more, if Scott & French had not been along.” The duo also interrogated South Carolina’s officers about whether they were doing business on the side. French told them the details of his involvement with Hannehan, averring that it was his only engagement outside his official duties.⁸⁷

When Steedman and Fullerton completed their investigation in July, Steedman reported to the president that “the Bureau officers, with a very few exceptions constitute a Radical close corporation, devoted to the defeat of the policy of your Administration,” and that they were actively conspiring by mail with Northern politicians to accomplish it—an allegation that the generals’ report helped to make a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁸⁸

Their report was published in Northern newspapers in installments that followed their tour, exposing the incompetence and misconduct in the Freedmen’s Bureau for all to see. In the installment on the region of the old Department of the South—South Carolina

⁸⁶ Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 250; Cimbala, *Freedmen’s Bureau*, 14-15, 24

⁸⁷ M. French to Oliver Otis Howard, June 19, 1866, FFP; M. French to James B. Steedman and Joseph S. Fullerton, May 14, 1866, FFP.

⁸⁸ Cimbala, *Freedmen’s Bureau*, 14.

and the coastal portions of Georgia and Florida—published in June, Steedman wrote of the brutal murder of a freedman near Edgefield, South Carolina. He claimed that Edgefield’s white citizens were outraged by it but did not prosecute because they understood the authority to do so to be in the hands of the Bureau, which failed to do its job. They assured him that if they had authority locally, such criminals would be brought to justice. Steedman described the Sea Islands as a place of anarchy with rampant swindling by whites authorized to sell to the freedpeople there, freedpeople’s wages withheld by planters, little work being done by blacks, tracts possessed by freedmen in the Sherman territory much larger than the forty acres the law allowed them, and black vigilante militance to prevent the incursion of white people. Steedman maintained that an “impartial comparison” of black settlers on the Sea Islands with inland blacks who remained on their plantations of origin, “aided by the advice of sensible and practical military and Bureau officers,” revealed that the compliant freedpeople of the interior were “infinitely better off than those who have been assisted with rations and clothing by the Government.” Steedman and Fullerton recommended that “the most equitable solution” to the chaos in the Sherman territory was the complete return of all land to its owners to be completed by January 1, 1867. The generals referenced assistant commissioners Tillson and Scott as being in agreement.⁸⁹

Steedman excoriated Rufus Saxton as flagrantly prodigal with the government-issued rations he issued to freedpeople that encouraged them not to work. Saxton’s profligacy was proven by Scott’s judicious reduction of humanitarian aid. The generals

⁸⁹ “Affairs in the South,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1866.

held Saxton responsible for the reprehensible state of affairs they found on the Sea Islands. Steedman also blasted Saxton for absconding with all the official records of his administration, which Saxton self-defeatingly took northward to use as evidence for his effort to clear his name after his removal by Johnson.⁹⁰

Some of the juiciest portions of the report involved profiteering by Bureau staff in South Carolina. Steedman alleged that an officer named Ely employed by the Bureau in Columbia, far from headquarters in Charleston, was neglecting his job in favor of working his own planting operations in which he garnered a rich return by oppressing freedpeople. Steedman also exposed French and Lott's partnership with William Hannehan. "Chaplain French explained to us that in making the agreement . . . he was actuated solely by a desire to assist him to furnish labor for the poor freedmen," Steedman wrote; "but with even an ordinary crop, he will not receive less than 250 or 300 per cent. on the money advanced." Steedman testified that when he and Fullerton brought Scott's attention to the nefarious deeds of Ely, French, and Lott, the assistant commissioner "evinced his disapproval" of their actions. Steedman's report included text clearly intended to apply to French:

Faithful and efficient agents of the Bureau, who have confined themselves to their legitimate functions, have been aided in the discharge of their duties by the citizens of South Carolina, while incompetent and meddlesome agents, wherever located, have aroused bitter feelings and encountered opposition from the white people. . . . It is very apparent that such employees as "Bureau Missionary," . . . can be dispensed with without detriment to either the Government or freedmen.⁹¹

Steedman and Fullerton's conclusion was clear: such a pernicious institution as

⁹⁰ "Affairs in the South," *New York Times*, June 13, 1866.

⁹¹ "Affairs in the South," *New York Times*, June 13, 1866.

the Freedmen's Bureau must either be done away with, or it must be enfolded into the military commands of right-thinking generals, or at the very least its scope must be shrunk and its resources sharply cut. It obviously did not fit the generals' agenda to reason that if distant, unsupervised officers took unjust advantage of their positions, and if vendors swindled freedpeople, planters oppressed them, and whites generally abused them, that perhaps the problem was that the Bureau had too few officers and resources rather than too many. They also soft-pedaled what they heard whenever they asked blacks about the Freedmen's Bureau—that it was absurd to eliminate the agency while Southern whites did not acknowledge blacks' equality with them and threatened the lives of those who claimed it.⁹²

The Bureau officers in South Carolina were outraged when they learned of Steedman and Fullerton's report. French's fellow officer James P. Low scorned the generals' distress at not finding Saxton's records, because they refused to look at the ones that Scott offered them, and Low himself had an account of "every cent" transacted under Saxton's administration. Low sardonically "read the report with much inward laughter" remembering Jesus' admonition, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you."⁹³ For his part, Scott was incensed that the generals made him—a Johnson appointee—look good at Rufus Saxton's expense. He was equally angered that Steedman lied that Scott disapproved of French and Lott's involvement with Hannehan when in fact Scott explicitly told Steedman that he approved it. Scott doubted that French would make more

⁹² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 181.

⁹³ Luke 6:26.

than a moderate return on his investment; Low told French he would not give him ten dollars to buy him out of it. French was in Washington when Steedman and Fullerton's report on South Carolina went public, and he wrote a mortified refutation to Oliver Otis Howard. He protested that if the investigators had a problem with him turning a threefold profit, then they must have an equal problem with the black workers profiting proportionately. (In fact, although it is unknown how French made out on the deal, the cotton crop in 1866 took a miserable hit due to adverse weather and the army worm while the commodity's price continued to decline. French may well have lost money on the investment, although he does appear to have gotten some cash out of it at harvest time.)⁹⁴

Unfortunately for French, there was much more mud yet for him to be dragged through. The rest of Johnson's phalanx of inspectors consisted of newspaper reporters. After the Civil War, journalists increasingly viewed themselves as members of a profession with a mission to uncover the sordid story behind events. Public officials, then, were not merely topics to be covered but were adversaries to be exposed. Of course newspapers of that era were openly partisan, but dispatches from roving correspondents went beyond mere spin. According to Mark Summers,

Journalists *would* publish anything, and without checking further to corroborate the story. Faced with a newsworthy charge, a reporter could not afford silence, when rival correspondents were wiring details. . . . A journalist might even—often did—fabricate descriptions, invent scandals, or publish long interviews that no lips ever emitted.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ James P. Low to M. French, June 15, 1866, FFP; M. French to Oliver Otis Howard, June 19, 1866, FFP; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 153-54; Robert K. Scott to M. French, October 10, 1867, FFP; Robert K. Scott to M. French, October 18, 1867, FFP. In October French lent money to fellow Bureau officer Francis Cardozo and sent some cash to Austa; see Mansfield French to George Whipple and M. E. Strieby, October 16, 1866, AMA H6237; M. French to A. French, October 19, 1866, FFP.

⁹⁵ Cimballa, *Freedmen's Bureau*, 24; Summers, *Era of Good Stealings*, 62-68.

One of Johnson's investigators was a New Englander named Benjamin C.

Truman, a reporter who went to the front as a war correspondent and went on to serve on the staffs of various Union generals. He also served as Johnson's aide when Johnson was Tennessee's military governor. Truman traveled through the South at Johnson's direction as a correspondent for the *New York Times*. He claimed to be a Republican who supported everything that Lincoln had done, but in 1866 he was markedly conservative, and he stored up a mighty cache of censure for Mansfield French.⁹⁶

On July 23 the *Times* published a letter by Truman from Beaufort, which he described as being completely Yankee-ized; oddly, given his own background, he considered this a bad thing, caricaturing Beaufort's New Englanders with the classic Yankee stereotype (stinginess) and portraying them as vehement about prosecuting the innocent Johnson. Truman endeavored to prove his progressiveness on race by testifying that freedpeople were good-mannered, hard workers and by relating his conversation with a black barber (although he was displeased with how familiar local blacks were with whites). Unfortunately for the freedpeople, said Truman, Steedman and Fullerton "have not told half" of the advantage taken of the blacks. "These colored people have been swindled beyond all consideration," Truman proclaimed; "and if the Freedmen's Bureau Bill now before the House becomes a law, God help the colored men of the South, say I."⁹⁷

Then Truman described the worst perpetrator of them all:

⁹⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Truman, Benjamin Cummings"; Benjamin C. Truman, "Georgia," *New York Times*, June 30, 1866.

⁹⁷ "Affairs in the South," *New York Times*, July 23, 1866.

The most distinguished and most successful of all of these negro robbers is a former chaplain, known as Father FRENCH, who has in the past four years accumulated a quarter of a million dollars in cash and real estate. Even the Northern people here, to a man, pronounce Father FRENCH the Tycoon of all the robbers. He had Gen. SAXON completely under his control, and got him into bad repute. He was ordered away from the auction sales by the Direct Tax Commissioners, but managed to buy all the property he bid on, which was considerable. . . .

Father FRENCH'S operations extend from here to Charleston, both in the purchase of real estate and in running plantations. His *modus operandi* in the purchase of land was as follows: Thousands of acres of fine lands were laid off and called soldiers' tracts, to be sold to soldiers at certain low prices. Father FRENCH would buy in these lots, ostensibly for the soldiers, the latter being present at the sales; but in almost all cases the certificates ultimately found their way into Father FRENCH'S pockets. But his negro-swindling operations beat everything. He is the biggest planter South Carolina ever had. He is running thousands of negroes, and running them into debt and into their graves. They are all in debt to him, on account of his lofty charges for meal and Attleborough jewelry. For certain reasons, I will not give this bad man at this time the full extent of my knowledge of his operations in South Carolina. He has been sent for from Washington; but it is the common expression here that he will pull the wool over the eyes of the authorities there. . . .

[C]ormorants of the Father French style of philanthropist, and he among them, have swindled the poor freedmen so completely that half of them are destitute and dependent on charity.⁹⁸

Truman's accusations are far-fetched, to say the least. The treatment of blacks that he describes is totally at variance with French's well-established passion for their betterment. He certainly did not spend the money on Attleborough jewelry—that would have been quite a tipoff to other observers of the austere Methodist minister. We can imagine where some of the allegations came from, however. First of all, nosing about in Beaufort Truman would easily have unearthed an abundant trove of stories about French's villainy from his old Unitarian and military despisers. They would have told

⁹⁸ "Affairs in the South," *New York Times*, June 13, 1866.

Truman that Saxton's perceived misdeeds were all French's fault and that French's slick handling of superiors ensured that he would never be caught. They also would have described French's heated contest with William Henry Brisbane which might have given rise to the false claim that French was prohibited from the tax sales. Second, Truman's description of French's "modus operandi" is very similar to Saxton and French's preemption plan in which Edward Hooper, Saxton's aide-de-camp, was to bid for black squatters' claims on their behalf. Third, as will be seen in the next chapter, French did acquire property on the Sea Islands (though nowhere near as much as Truman represented), and how he managed to do so in all cases is a disconcertingly unanswered question. Fourth, French was indeed in Washington, but not because he was summoned by superiors—rather, it was to lobby Congress on behalf of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill, which Truman was working to defeat.⁹⁹

French had endured criticism and bad press for four years, but Truman's exposé went beyond anything flung at him before. French was not a man who ignored public rebuke and had on occasion mounted a defense personally or through intermediaries like James Thompson, but the magnitude of Truman's charges required a much more powerful rebuttal. French's friend and National Freedman's Relief Association officer Edgar Ketchum, an attorney whose son A. P. Ketchum was a Bureau officer also criticized in print by Steedman, immediately offered to represent French in a libel suit. French turned down Ketchum's offer, but at Secretary of the Interior James Harlan's suggestion French did rely on Ketchum to help him line up an awesome array of endorsements for

⁹⁹ See pp. 354-55, 532; Robert K. Scott to M. French, June 12, 1866, FFP.

publication. It took time, but on January 27, 1867 the *New York Times* printed a retraction of Truman's allegations accompanied by the testimonies of heavy-hitters who praised French's integrity and usefulness. Commendations from South Carolina Freedmen's Bureau officers came from A. P. Ketchum, James Low, and, in a gratifying twist, Reuben Tomlinson, currently serving as the Bureau's superintendent of education in the state. Tomlinson, who years before judged that the self-important busybody French did as much harm as good, had been won over by French's sheer tenacity in advocating for the freedpeople; French, like Tomlinson, stayed in South Carolina well after most Gideonites went home. Privately Tomlinson said that "with all his eccentricities, he is true to the Colored man, and to the country." Other supporters from Beaufort days included James Thompson and, perhaps most surprising of all, D. N. Cooley. Cooley was appointed to replace Abram D. Smith on the Direct Tax Commission for South Carolina, and it would have been the most natural thing in the world for him to adopt the view of French held by commissioners Brisbane and William E. Wording. Cooley, however, took French's side. (He was also the one principally responsible for roping French into stumping for the Republican ticket in New York in 1864 and bailing him out with the army afterward.)¹⁰⁰

In the public eye, however, these endorsements paled in comparison to the commendations offered (some through third parties' recollections) by six generals who served in the Department of the South (Isaac Ingalls Stevens, Hunter, Saxton, Mitchel, Gillmore, and C. H. Van Wyck). He was also endorsed by Admiral Du Pont, General

¹⁰⁰ Mansfield J[oseph] French to *New York Times*, November 21, 1939, copy (3F21-012-013), FFP; Mansfield French to George Whipple, February 13, 1867, AMA H6411; "Chaplain Mansfield French," *New York Times*, January 29, 1867; see pp. 336-37 above; Reuben Tomlinson to J. Miller McKim, February 19, 1867, May Anti-Slavery Manuscript Collection; D. N. Cooley to Rufus Saxton, January 23, 1865, FFP.

Scott, and even General Steedman (whose 1865 recommendation to Johnson French cleverly repurposed)! Bringing up the rear was Salmon P. Chase, now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States (the lofty but politically impotent perch on which Lincoln placed Chase after maneuvering him out of his Cabinet).¹⁰¹

In light of these overpowering testimonials, the *Times* wilted and repudiated all of Truman's accusations. Its editor, Henry J. Raymond, offered the explanation that Truman had a "semi-official" position and that he cited "official records" of the department—presumably the ones that Rufus Saxton supposedly abducted—as corroboration of his claims. Raymond theorized that formal charges had been brought against French but that Truman failed to see that French had been exonerated. French was furious that Raymond soiled the *Times*' retraction with mention of formal charges. "There never was a *charge* or *complaint in writing*, made against me," he protested to a friend:

No man dared to sign his name to any written *charge*. It was only vague rumor, that was ever afloat. I *never* was called upon, by Genl. Saxton, or any other officer to answer to any charges. The spirit of Mr. Raymond's apology seems to be good, & but for his gratuitous, needless, & injurious statement, *every particular* of which is *false*, it would be satisfactory.

French gave Raymond the benefit of the doubt, but he sent Edgar Ketchum at him again to set the record straight. Ketchum provided letters from Saxton and Scott, which Raymond printed on March 25, testifying that no official charges were ever filed against French or recorded under either of their administrations.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ "Chaplain Mansfield French," *New York Times*, January 29, 1867; quotes from some of these men are given on p. 342.

¹⁰² "Chaplain Mansfield French," *New York Times*, January 29, 1867; Mansfield French to George Whipple, February 13, 1867, AMA H6411; "The Case of Rev. Mansfield French—Further Correction of Misstatements," *New York Times*, March 25, 1867.

Although French is highly unlikely to have been guilty of what Truman accused him of, there remains one curiosity about his defense: although he supplied copious testimonies of his integrity, there was little among them that addressed the actual charges. The closest refutations were denials that French was ordered away from the tax sales, A. P. Ketchum's insistence that French "[never] accumulated a dollar during his residence at the South, exclusive of his salary," and Scott's testimony that he was "a poor man."¹⁰³

Over the months that French and Edgar Ketchum prepared his rebuttal, however, French was still looking for creative ways to get land for freedpeople. Johnson's efforts to block passage of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill were unsuccessful; the Bureau's life was extended for two years and supplied with its own source of funding. However, although freedpeople were granted "permission to lease twenty-acre lots in other government-owned lands, with a six-year option to buy," Congress left unsupported the titles to land in the Sherman territory in order to secure the required two-thirds majorities.¹⁰⁴

French spent the whole summer of 1866 in Washington (not only lobbying Congress but also working on "Rules of the Bureau" for Howard) with some leave to go home to New York. Yet in mid-November he was headed from Charleston back north again. The problem in getting land to black buyers was as ever white planters' stubborn refusal to sell to them under any circumstances, so Robert K. Scott devised another workaround that required him and French to do business outside their official duties. In November Scott struck a deal in principle to buy two plantations totaling 1,865 acres on

¹⁰³ "Chaplain Mansfield French," *New York Times*, January 29, 1867.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 296.

Johns Island for twenty-one thousand dollars over three years, less than half the going price. When the ink was dry, Scott intended to resell the land to freedmen in parcels of ten to forty acres. Scott believed that there were enough freedmen with means to pay half to all of the price of their lots at once. French's job was to find investors to front the money so that Scott could purchase. French could guarantee the backers a hefty return when the freedmen bought their lots. Scott was also looking for a trustworthy man outside of the Freedmen's Bureau to manage the operation. He knew that there would be an uproar as soon as he was discovered to be selling land to blacks and expected to be accused of "all kinds of rascality," but his reputation among whites Southern or Northern was not a high priority for him.¹⁰⁵

French therefore first visited Salmon P. Chase in Washington and asked him for the money. Chase promised to "see what can be done & let him know on his return from N.Y. next week" and "advised him to try & enlist friends in New York." By the end of the month Scott was already dividing the land among freedmen and making out deeds, and a week later he had his eye on three more fertile plantations that he could get for the same rate, but French had not yet come through with the money. In December, however, French did get a loan from Chase's friend, highly connected Republican financier Jay Cooke. For once, a scheme that French was involved with worked: in three months almost four thousand acres of prime Sea Island land ended up securely in the hands of freedpeople. It is unknown how much land and money ended up in Scott's hands. He set his resale price to get him enough money to cover his debt based on the demand that he

¹⁰⁵ Mansfield French to George Whipple, August 8, 1866, AMA 16995; Robert K. Scott to M. French, letters of November 18, 22, and 27, 1866, FFP.

expected; if he gauged demand perfectly then he was left with landholdings, and if demand ran higher then he garnered a cash surplus, which he may have used to buy up still more land for resale. Scott contemplated retiring from the army to make his living as the freedmen's land broker.¹⁰⁶ At the same time that he was dealing land to freedpeople Scott and French traveled to the coastal region near Savannah to persuade mutinous black settlers to surrender their claims in the Sherman tract in favor of leasing twenty-acre plots under the provisions of the Freedmen's Bureau Act. French chanted a tune to the freedpeople quite different from the one he sang three years before.¹⁰⁷

One more initiative French took in this vein deserves mention. In 1866 the American Missionary Association and other evangelical organizations shifted their strategy for educating freedpeople from elementary education to the founding of colleges to train black teachers who over the long haul would make a much greater impact. In late summer, French began encouraging the AMA to plant a normal school in Beaufort. He envisioned the college to be founded "in the spirit & faith, in which Oberlin was founded . . . only a reversed one, with *nearly all colored* students, & only a *sprinkling* of *white* ones. . . . Let us have a light-house on those islands, that will cast its light not only

¹⁰⁶ Nevin, *Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 1:640; Robert K. Scott to M. French, December 6, 1866, FFP; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 7, 1867, SPC; Robert K. Scott to M. French, November 22, 1866, FFP. Chase recorded in his diary that French asked for twenty-five thousand dollars, ten thousand immediately, yet Scott's quick repayment of the loan was in two seven-thousand-dollar installments plus a third of unspecified size. It seems likely that the actual loan amount was twenty-one thousand to be paid back in three installments plus interest. Chase may have put down the figures inaccurately in his diary, but it is also possible that French knowingly overshot his request for an unknown reason—either to buy more land or to compensate himself and/or Scott for their efforts.

¹⁰⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 176, 297; "Meeting of Freedmen on the Fife (South Carolina Coast) Plantation," *The National Republican* (Savannah), February 4, 1867; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 7, 1867, SPC. In late 1866 French was criticized in the press for "teaching the Freedmen dangerous principles." In rebuttal, *Zion's Herald* reprinted an excerpt from "a Southern paper" describing French speaking to two thousand freedmen at St. Helena Island urging them to do "their solemn duty strictly to perform and fully carry out their contracts and agreements"; see "Religious and Church Intelligence," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 21, 1866.

all over the benighted South, but all over *Africa*.” French wanted the AMA to buy 150 to 200 acres at low prices and then endow the school for a half million or more Northern dollars over the next ten to twenty years. French also believed that some of the more prosperous blacks in Beaufort like Robert Smalls would subscribe their own money to the project. The association expressed cautious interest, and French began looking for opportunities to purchase on its behalf. He also offered to get a leave of absence to raise funds in the North for the endeavor, highly confident that he would be successful. In the spring of 1867 he got Oliver Otis Howard to express openness to disbursing Freedmen’s Bureau funds to the project.¹⁰⁸

It only took a little time, however, for French to come to the conclusion that the best building in Beaufort for the new college’s headquarters was his own house, the Fuller family’s Tabby Manse. French felt “embarrassed in saying anything, *because* it is *mine*, & yet, I do think it is, of all places in Beaufort, the *best*, the *healthiest*, the most *suitable* & the *cheapest*.” French was willing to sell for 4,500 dollars in cash or 5,000 over three years, far less than what it would cost the association to build. French pointed out that if he succeeded in getting the AMA a grant from Howard, that money could be used to pay him. He insisted that he was “not so particular about selling my house,” but he was sure that it was the best place.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 405-7; Marjorie H. Parker, “Some Educational Activities of the Freedmen’s Bureau,” *Journal of Negro Education* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1954): 12; Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, September 6, 1866, AMA 17022; Mansfield French to George Whipple and M. E. Strieby, October 16, 1866, AMA H6237; M. E. Strieby to E. P. Smith, November 17, 1866, 90414; M. E. Strieby to E. P. Smith, November 20, 1866, 90426; Mansfield French to George Whipple and M. E. Strieby, January 10, 1867, AMA H6346; Mansfield French to George Whipple, April 6, 1867, AMA 17270; Mansfield French to George Whipple, April 16, 1867, AMA H6545.

¹⁰⁹ Mansfield French to George Whipple and M. E. Strieby, January 10, 1867, AMA H6346; Mansfield French to George Whipple, April 16, 1867, AMA H6545.

As the spring progressed and the AMA dithered about the Beaufort possibility and managed its other college projects, French pressured the association harder to buy his house and make a school there a reality, frustrated that the AMA and Howard were each waiting for the other to write the first check. French predicted (accurately) that South Carolina would be readmitted to the Union in a year with a new constitution that provided for public education. He expected that the state would fund Beaufort's college by levying heavy taxes on large property holders and thereby take the responsibility for maintaining it off the AMA's hands. French said that the amount of money he put into the property had risen, and by asking for 4,500 instead of 5,000 he was effectively making the association a 500 dollar donation. He affected disinterest as to whether the AMA chose his house or another since he was confident that the new college would so buoy local property values that his house would then be worth 6,000 dollars. At the same time French begged Howard to shift as large a portion of funds as possible from the appropriations of 1866 and 1868 for South Carolina into 1867.¹¹⁰

What happened next is quite confusing and uncertain, but one reconstruction of events is as follows. First, in the fall of 1867 the AMA chose to acquire French's house in Beaufort. As payment the association gave him a three hundred-acre cotton plantation it possessed on Johns Island, South Carolina, on which the society had intended to launch an agricultural school. The deed to this land, however, was owned by Salmon P. Chase. Chase was cognizant of the deal that the AMA struck with French, which presumably

¹¹⁰ Mansfield French to George Whipple, April 19, 1867, AMA H6553; Mansfield French to unknown, April 26, 1867, AMA H6564; Mansfield French to Oliver Otis Howard, May 17, 1867, Oliver Otis Howard Collection.

required the AMA to acquire and transfer the title, but apparently the association did not give Chase what he wanted in exchange for the deed. French intended to liquidate the land immediately by selling it to a farmer for five thousand dollars over three years with no money down. (The farmer had little money at the moment because of 1867's awful cotton yield.) Yet though French and the farmer reached an agreement, that transaction was never settled, presumably because French could not get the title to the land from Chase. Left in the lurch, French contracted with someone to farm and sublet the land and houses on the plantation for the 1868 crop; French and the manager were to split the owner's share of the cotton half and half.¹¹¹

Second, it seems that French somehow wound up with half the interest in a mansion bought by James Thompson and James P. Low called the "Barnwell house" or the "Castle." French's interest put him on the hook to pay half of the final three quarters of its purchase price by February 1, 1868. In December 1867 French tried to broker a deal wherein the AMA would purchase the mansion by giving Thompson and Low another of its properties and by paying French five hundred dollars. At the same time, French assured the AMA that Howard was going to give the association ten thousand dollars for the college in Beaufort in 1868, because French had just finished helping Representative Halbert E. Paine to craft a bill that involved the liquidation of government lands on the

¹¹¹ Mansfield French to George Whipple?, April 26, 1867, AMA H6564; Mansfield French to E. P. Smith, September 23, 1869, AMA 74135; Mansfield French to E. P. Smith, October 9, 1869, AMA 74136; Mansfield French to George Whipple, December 28, 1869, AMA 93926; Mansfield French to George Whipple, January 3, 1870, AMA 93988; Mansfield French to George Whipple, January 6, 1870, AMA 93997; Robert K. Scott to M. French, October 10, 1867, FFP; Robert K. Scott to M. French, date unknown (1867), FFP; M. French to A. French, January 8, 1868, FFP; contract with Francis Dover, February 11, 1868, FFP. The proposed agricultural school may have been the same land as that originally purposed by the AMA for a normal school; the association subsequently turned over the school's operations as a primary school to the Freedmen's Bureau. See Mansfield French to George Whipple, January 14, 1867, AMA H6351.

Sea Islands to fund education in that part of South Carolina.¹¹²

The details of what actually transpired between French and the American Missionary Association through all of this are murky, but some things are clear. First, the AMA never did build their “Oberlin” in Beaufort, and second, French was trying hard to set up a kickback scheme. In two instances he used his position as a public servant to win money from the government for a private group and suggested to that group that it disburse the money in a way that he would personally profit. If the AMA had bought French’s house for his asking price in cash—or if French had successfully unloaded the Johns Island plantation that the association gave him for it—he would have sold it for more than two and half times what he paid for it after a mere three years of ownership. If the AMA did acquire the Barnwell house, then French safely got his five hundred dollars out of it and escaped an obligation three times that size. In both cases French’s influence in the Freedmen’s Bureau and Congress supplied the AMA with the funds to make those financial moves.¹¹³

Does this prove that French’s accusers were right all along, that he really was the avaricious scam artist that they believed him to be? In the judgment of this author, no, or at least not quite. The pattern of French’s behavior described in this chapter, especially in 1866-67 culminating in his bargaining with the AMA, may be explained as astonishing naïveté about conflict of interest and the appearance of impropriety. French did not see

¹¹² Mansfield French to George Whipple, December 20, 1867, AMA 17484.

¹¹³ French purchased the Tabby Manse for 1,700 dollars on January 26, 1864, paying a quarter down (425 dollars) with the rest to pay by January 1867. He originally hoped to sell it for five to six thousand dollars, perhaps before the balance came due (“Army, Navy, or Marine Land Certificate, No. 148,” FFP; M. French to A. French, April 2, 1864, FFP).

his actions as self-interested profiteering but as a win for all parties: the AMA gets its college, the Freedmen's Bureau fulfills its mandate, South Carolina gets teachers for its public schools, black children get trained educators, and French makes a windfall on investments whose obligations weighed him down—the perfect outcome.

This interpretation may make me appear as naive as I believe French to have been. Yet as we will see, French found himself in a political race in 1868 where payola abounded, but on principle he refused to participate; he surely could have found backers to give him the money to pay bribes if he wanted it.¹¹⁴ As will be described at the end of the chapter, French was amazingly credulous about the integrity of friends and allies on the take. French stood steadfastly against corruption, but like some others of his era, he had a narrow view of what corruption was.

In any case, the AMA affair forms a fitting conclusion to French's practice of entangling his personal interests with his relentless efforts to win land and tangible benefits for blacks. For his recklessness, sloppiness, acquisitiveness, and short-sightedness he took much abuse, but he never learned his lesson.

The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson

Johnson's smear campaign against the Freedmen's Bureau in 1866 made the president French's permanent enemy. French vented his anger over Johnson's actions by putting on paper the most bizarre typological complex of his long history of biblical interpretation. The unpublished—but perhaps orally delivered—work had its roots in an

¹¹⁴ See pp. 496-501.

episode in Johnson's career when he was uncharacteristically friendly toward blacks. Johnson's hatred of the Confederacy was driven from deep-seated class rage against princely planters who dragged the poor whites of hardscrabble eastern Tennessee into rebellion. Johnson had no innate love for blacks, and he held slaves himself; as military governor of Tennessee, his abolitionism was about hounding down blacks' former owners. Yet in 1864, whites in middle Tennessee still resolutely resisted Union occupancy while blacks supported Johnson's efforts, so Johnson had a temporary change of heart. In the fall of 1864 he delivered a speech that expressed the desirability of confiscating plantations and dividing them among loyal farmers. Like any Democrat he dismissed racial equality and raised the specter of miscegenation, but with a remarkable twist. To blacks in the audience he thundered,

Your wives and daughters shall no longer be dragged into a concubinage, compared to which polygamy is a virtue, to satisfy the brutal lusts of slaveholders and overseers! Henceforth the sanctity of God's holy law of marriage shall be respected in your persons, and the great State of Tennessee shall no more give her sanction to your degradation and your shame!

He was not done. Buoyed by acclaim from his black hearers, Johnson wistfully wished aloud "that, as in the days of old, a Moses might arise who should lead them safely to their promised land of freedom and happiness." "You are our Moses!" the crowd shouted insistently in reply. After first demurring, Johnson accepted the call. "I will indeed be your Moses, and lead you through the Red Sea of war and bondage, to a fairer future of liberty and peace. I speak now as one who feels the world his country, and all who love equal rights his friends."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 63-64; *Nashville Times and True Union*, October 25 and November 9, 1864, <http://www.nps.gov/anjo/historyculture/moses-speech.htm> (accessed August 28, 2014).

It was an astounding conclusion and was long remembered, especially by abolitionists. The themes of land redistribution, sexual purity safeguarded by legal marriages, equal rights, and universal brotherhood lodged deeply in Mansfield French, but Johnson's use of Exodus typology took the cake, and it made the president's thorough retreat from the promise of the speech downright obscene in French's eyes. In the wake of the Steedman and Fullerton report French concocted a weird, bitter satire that compared the biblical "Moses I" to Johnson, whom he called "Moses III." ("Moses II" was probably Lincoln.) According to French, the biblical Moses was called by the angel of the Lord, whereas Johnson called himself. Both Moseses were poor speakers, but Moses I had the wisdom to employ a spokesman. Moses' "spokesman or Secretary . . . silenced every copperhead [snake] in Pharaoh's court that hissed against emancipation" while Johnson kept Secretary Stanton from doing the same against Copperheads, as wartime Democrats were known. Indeed, Moses had the power to turn a copperhead into a "rod(ical), or as the democratic version reads, *a radical*," while Johnson attempted the reverse. Moses, unlike Johnson, "not only led out all the people, but all their property." Moses got "the higher law" from God on Mount Sinai while Johnson wanted copperheads to issue laws in accordance with the "old laws of Egypt." ("Black codes" that restricted blacks' liberties in Southern states were probably on French's mind.) Furthermore, unlike Johnson, Moses refused to pardon any unrepentant rebel ringleaders but destroyed them in the Red Sea. However, French noted, a legend persisted in America that the Egyptians were sunk so deep as to resurface with the wreckage of their chariots on the Atlantic coast; thus "F.F.V."—the First Families of Virginia—actually stands for

“Faraoh Families V” (Roman numeral five for five thousand years). Moses “never sent out a Fuller-ton to soft-soap (his name indeed) the enemies of the freedmen. Nor a Steed-man to ride rough shod, all day, over the true friends of the freedman, & then at night ride down helpless females.” In fact, when Moses was proven unworthy of bringing the freedpeople to the promised land, he humbly asked God to appoint a replacement, but Johnson stubbornly refused to step aside.¹¹⁶

It must be understood that French did not make this comparison to be clever or merely to find a useful rhetorical handle for explaining the politics of the day to blacks. French seriously believed that the conflict in which he was embroiled was the latest battle in a war that had raged between the forces of freedom and bondage, good and evil, for thousands of years, and that the Bible revealed its pattern, as fresh and relevant in 1866 as in the second millennium B.C.E. French considered this to be the authentic interpretation of the Moses saga for his generation. He also, therefore, viewed Reconstruction politics as the battleground in a holy war just like actual battlefields had been from 1861 to 1865. The rules of engagement were the same: those who oppressed the freedpeople must be politically eliminated without mercy if they did not repent.

French’s biblical justification was idiosyncratic, but his take-no-prisoners attitude was not. He shared it increasingly with a political faction in Washington known as “radical Republicans,” with whom French mingled more each year after the war. The term “radical Republican” is somewhat confusing, because in the parlance of the day “Radical [capital-R] Republican” referred to any anti-Johnson Republican after Johnson

¹¹⁶ “I will be your Moses” (sermon?), FFP. The biblical allusions French makes may be traced to Exodus 3:1-10; 4:10-16; 7:8-12; 10:24-26; 14:26-30; 24:12-18; Numbers 27:12-23.

vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau and Civil Rights Bills in 1866. Thus, "Radicals" included both "conservative [centrist] Radicals" and "radical Radicals." The latter group was, in Hans L. Trefousse's words, "an amorphous group of determined opponents of slavery, who had often held progressive ideas long before the founding of the party. Frequently but not always of New England ancestry, they brought to Washington firmly held ideas of social betterment." In the 1850s and '60s radical Republicans were more or less the political arm of the abolitionist movement. Like French, they insisted that emancipation be the chief war aim during the conflict, and they similarly pressed for full equality for blacks in a thoroughly remade Southern society—including in politics—to be the goal of Reconstruction. When Johnson rudely rejected moderate Republicans' Reconstruction plans as embodied in the two 1866 bills, the moderates joined forces with the radicals to shape the contours of Reconstruction without him.¹¹⁷

In January 1867, George Julian, one of the most prominent and powerful radicals, argued in a speech before the House of Representatives that what the South needed was the strong, coercive presence of the federal government over an extended period of time, long enough for a new civil and social order, "a Christian civilization and a living democracy," to take root, fed by "Northern capital and labor, Northern energy and enterprise." In Julian's view, Reconstruction would end when the South was well on its way to fundamental transformation. Congress responded to Julian's argument by passing a series of laws that established military supremacy over the civil authorities of the South. French approved. "[A]s during the war, Providence would not allow us to *put down* the

¹¹⁷ Benedict, *Compromise of Principle*, 22-23; Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 33; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 238.

rebellion, until we *put down slavery*,” he wrote to Salmon P. Chase, “so now, Congress is not allowed to set *Southern rebels* on their feet, until the *freedmen* are set upon theirs. It took time to work *conviction* in the *Northern* mind then, & it takes time now, to work conviction in the *national* mind.” French saw the hand of Providence in Johnson’s conciliatory actions toward the South: they made “the Southern animus” toward blacks, vividly displayed in a rising wave of brutality, visible for the Northern public to see so that the cancer could be eradicated before reconstruction allowed it to spread through the entire nation. At the moment, Northerners saw whites and blacks when it looked at the South, French wrote to the AMA, but

God will remove the film from the nation’s eyes, so that it shall see only *men, men too*, of his own creation, & therefore dear to his heart, as are all other men. We have not been elevated to the broad table lands of freedom yet, but the starting point, which we left at the beginning of the war, is a long way below us. We will not faint in the way, tho’ the ascent be steep, rugged & long, for God is our helper.¹¹⁸

In March 1867 Congress passed legislation that relegated all Southern states to territories with provisional governments that were required to reorganize themselves. Each state would be readmitted to the Union when it ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution (which defined all native-born people as citizens and decreed “the equal protection of the laws” for all) and guaranteed black suffrage in its constitution, a privilege still denied blacks in most Northern states. As with emancipation during the war, so with suffrage during Reconstruction: Republicans were divided as to which was the end and which was the means. To radicals, political necessity provided the leverage

¹¹⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 281-82; Current, *Northernizing the South*, 71-82; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 7, 1867, SPC; Mansfield French to George Whipple, February 13, 1867, AMA H6411.

for social progress; to moderates, civil and political equality was required to establish loyal, Republican state governments in the South. Regardless of the motivation, Congress's action sparked a flurry of political organization among eager Southern blacks. In keeping with French's "great deal of influence with the colored population," in the words of one Northern visitor, he participated in mass meetings for the formation of the Republican Party in South Carolina, the rank and file of which were virtually all black and which was dominated by radical policy ideas.¹¹⁹

French's involvement in party formation fit neatly with the intersection of religion and politics among both Northern Methodists and Southern blacks. Methodist bishop Matthew Simpson had a well-known friendship with Abraham Lincoln and conducted the fallen president's funeral in Springfield, Illinois. Methodist historian Frederick A. Norwood notes that event's "symbolic significance": the largest denomination in the country, which stood solidly behind the war effort, was "becoming a sort of unofficial national church." The denomination might also be considered the religious wing of the Republican Party. Northern Methodist missionaries swarmed South to teach freedpeople under the auspices of the Freedmen's Bureau and the protection of Federal soldiers, and Southerners despised them as the shock troops of a Yankee onslaught to annihilate Southern culture and replace it with their own. In South Carolina, Northern missionaries, especially Methodists, were one of the main sources of leadership of the nascent state Republican Party. Yet black church leadership that antedated emancipation also formed a

¹¹⁹ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 374-75; C. Vann Woodward, "Seeds of Failure in Radical Race Policy," in *New Frontiers of the American Reconstruction*, Harold M. Hyman, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 135-36; "A Scene in Charleston," *The Circular*, October 28, 1867; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 311. French was enrolled as an "honorary member" of the state Republican party at its first convention (*Charleston Advocate*, May 18, 1867).

major source of Republican leadership. Black preachers used the very same typological interpretations of biblical narratives that French did to interpret political happenings to themselves and to their constituents. They continued to draw from a conviction that blacks constituted God's chosen "Israelite" people moving out of slavery to peaceful settlement in their own homes, and they quickly concluded that this destiny must be secured through activist "politics in Christ." When voting registration commenced in August 1867, French quipped, "Not a few Old Testament scenes have been re-enacted in the South, and we may see some more, for 'there remaineth very much land yet to be possessed' [Joshua 13:1]."¹²⁰

Meanwhile, Congress's firm action put belligerent white Southerners on guard; they realized that their defiance against Federal rule spurred Congress to strengthen it over their states substantially. Some Southern planters, like Wade Hampton in South Carolina, took a new approach and began soliciting blacks to vote for them in coming elections. National and local (transplanted) Republican leaders became alarmed that blacks might indeed vote out of affectionate personal ties to their former owners, and they rallied aggressively to solicit blacks into their ranks. This was the major reason for a tour of some Southern states by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, although the converse reason for his visit was to lower blacks' expectations for land redistribution, since Wilson and other Republicans sought to woo Southern moderates. Nevertheless,

¹²⁰ Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 242-43; Walter W. Benjamin, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the Postwar Era," in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:371-72; Hildebrand, *Times Were Strange*, 84-85; Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 365, 368; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 110-11; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 314-15; M. French, "South Carolina Affairs," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, September 5, 1867.

Wilson talked tough in the South, bluntly rehearsing for whites how slavery had made a disaster of their states, to the approval of French, who accompanied Wilson on his trek through South Carolina and Georgia. As God vowed judgment against Moab for resisting Israel's march to the promised land, French told Northern readers that he would do the same to Southern states that "by their action have prolonged the march of freedom."¹²¹

Republicans need not have worried about blacks turning Democratic—they had no desire to associate politically with their former masters. Once Southern whites realized that they were hardly winning over blacks at all, they angrily abandoned their attempt yet bided their time, waiting to see how the Northern electorate would react. French wrote Secretary Stanton not to relax the deployment of the military and the Freedmen's Bureau an inch, grateful for the relative calm but fearing violence at the upcoming harvest and elections. "Already threats are made & no longer ago than last week a colored minister was shot dead as he was going home from church, his only crime as reported being that he had told his people that 'they must be careful who they voted for,' " French wrote the secretary. "This people respect only power." French commented to Austa, "*All the South is like a seething pot. Rest is a long way off.*" He warned Northern Methodists to stand firm. "The North once consented to a compromise that ultimately ruined the South," French wrote in *Zion's Herald*. "Let not the North now, after its bitter experience in the furnace-fires of war, be a voluntary party to any compromise that will forestall justice,

¹²¹ Woodward, "Seeds of Failure," in Hyman, *New Frontiers*, 136-37; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 377-80; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 316; M. French, "Senator Wilson in Charleston," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, May 29, 1867.

and consequently the establishment of a permanent peace.”¹²²

But white Southerners were not disappointed. Black suffrage and equal rights were extremely unpopular in the North, where citizens feared that Federal policy toward the South would creep northward. Voters repudiated the Republican agenda and dealt the party humbling losses in state elections through the summer and fall of 1867. As they did, Southern whites’ boldness returned. They planned to resist compliance and overturn unsavory Federal policy, certain that the Northern electorate would soon oust radicals from Congress, vindicate President Johnson, and allow Southern whites to govern their states their own way. They consolidated a white Democratic Party and violently harassed Republican gatherings. A convention of South Carolina’s conservative whites protested that Congress had

sow[n] the seeds of discord in our midst and place[d] the best interests of society into the hands of an ignorant mob. They disfranchise the white citizen and enfranchise the newly emancipated slave. The slave of yesterday, who knew no law but the will of the master, is today about to be invested with the control of the government. . . .

Although these white citizens accommodated themselves to equal legal protection in life and property for white and black,

[we] enter our most solemn protest against the policy of investing the negro with political rights. The black man is what God and nature and circumstances have made him. . . . [T]he fact is patent to all that the negro is utterly unfitted to exercise the highest functions of the citizen. . . . As citizens of the United States we should not consent to live under negro supremacy, nor should we acquiesce in negro equality. Not for ourselves only, but on behalf of the Anglo-Saxon race and blood in this country, do we protest against this subversion of the great social law, whereby an ignorant and depraved race is placed in power and influence above

¹²² Woodward, “Seeds of Failure,” in Hyman, *New Frontiers*, 136-37; M. French to Edwin M. Stanton, August 6, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, August 19, 1867, FFP; French, “South Carolina Affairs,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, September 5, 1867.

the virtuous, the educated and the refined. By these acts of Congress intelligence and virtue are put under foot, while ignorance and vice are lifted into power.¹²³

These elites, many of whom were banned from voting by Congress because they had held public office before or during the war, cleverly handled the large swath of the white electorate that they despised as every bit as uneducated, uncouth, and devoid of virtue as the freedpeople. The job of those whites was to support the planters' interest in exchange for assurances that they remained superior to blacks in the social structure. In 1868, when South Carolina's new constitution, crafted by Republicans, was to come before the state for a vote, elites urged their fellow white citizens—those who did not boycott the new order by refusing to register to vote—to oppose it. They claimed that the constitution would result in “negro rule and supremacy at the point of the sword and bayonet—the work of sixty-odd negroes, many of them ignorant and depraved, together with fifty white men, outcasts of Northern society, and Southern renegades, betrayers of their race and country.” They described black rule as attended by a

train of countless evils. . . . We do not mean to threaten resistance by arms, but the people of our State will never quietly submit to negro rule. . . . This is a duty we owe to the land that is ours, to the graves that it contains, and to the race of which you and we are alike members—the proud Caucasian race, whose sovereignty on earth God has ordained, and they themselves have illustrated on the most brilliant pages of the world's history.

White elites also had a chilling message to blacks about the consequences when whites inevitably regained control:

Your present power must surely and soon pass from you. Nothing that it builds will stand and nothing will remain of it but the prejudices it may create. It is

¹²³ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 377-80; Woodward, “Seeds of Failure,” in Hyman, *New Frontiers*, 137-39; Robert K. Scott to M. French, October 10, 1867, FFP; John S. Reynolds, *Reconstruction in South Carolina 1865–1877* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 74-76.

therefore a most dangerous tool that you are handling. . . . We shall not give up our country, and time will soon restore our control of it. But we earnestly caution you and beg you in the meanwhile to beware of the use you make of your temporary power. Remember that your race has nothing to gain and everything to lose if you invoke that prejudice of race which since the world was made has ever driven the weaker tribe to the wall. Forsake, then, the wicked and stupid men who would involve you in this folly, and make to yourselves friends and not enemies of the white citizens of South Carolina. . . .¹²⁴

One of those “wicked and stupid men,” Mansfield French, was meanwhile becoming more and more intimate with the inner workings of Republican national politics. Again struck by malaria and diarrhea, French headed north in August 1867 to recuperate. In November and December this excursion yielded the opportunity to deepen his friendships with Washington power players. In an unusual throwback to Ohio days French took part in a powerful protracted meeting in Washington, but his main activity involved engaging with Salmon P. Chase, congressional Republicans, and general-in-chief Ulysses S. Grant’s chief of staff about the state of affairs in the South. He found his “old friends in Congress” to be “unusually cordial & confiding.”¹²⁵ French also joined other radicals in promoting Chase for the Republican nomination for president in 1868, which was met with gracious but firm replies from party power brokers that because of the electoral debacle of 1867, Grant would be the man.¹²⁶

Yet radicals were increasingly unwilling to wait for Johnson to leave office

¹²⁴ Reynolds, *Reconstruction in South Carolina*, 90-94.

¹²⁵ M. J. French to M. French and A. French, September 2, 1867, FFP; M. French to H. French, Sept. 24, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 2, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 4, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 25, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 29, 1867, FFP.

¹²⁶ M. French to H. French, September 24, 1867, FFP; M. French to Salmon P. Chase, August 20, 1867, FFP; John Weiss Forney to M. French, November 12, 1867, FFP; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 417-18; Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 362-66.

peacefully for a new president to be installed. Johnson's stalwart opposition to Lincoln's party in Congress was maddening to Republican lawmakers. Meanwhile, Republicans reeled in the maelstrom of the recent defeats at the polls, resurgent hostility toward blacks in the North and toward Republicans black and white in the South, and their own inability to agree on what was to be done. A growing number of radicals contemplated impeaching and deposing the president as the ultimate step.¹²⁷

It is possible that radicals seized on impeaching the president out of sheer frustration, not knowing what else to do to solve their problems. If so, however, the perpetually tactless Johnson provided the spark by amazingly managing to alienate congressional Republicans even more. In August 1867 Johnson removed Edwin M. Stanton as Secretary of War and replaced him with Grant as interim, and he also dismissed military commanders in Southern states in favor of conservatives. Agitated radicals brought an impeachment resolution to the House floor (which some had been pleading for for two years) in December, but it was defeated. Then Johnson attacked Congress's reconstruction policies, endorsed the actions of Winfield Scott Hancock, a Democratic commander in Louisiana who yielded to civil government there in violation of the Third Reconstruction Act, and replaced even more commanders. The Senate voted to restore Stanton to his position and on February 21, 1868 Johnson dismissed him again and ordered Grant to ignore Stanton's orders. The resultant public feud between Johnson and the popular Grant destroyed Johnson's already sullied reputation. Outraged, House Republicans rallied to impeach the president for violating the Tenure of Office Act, which

¹²⁷ Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 366-67, 372-79.

Congress had passed to prevent Johnson from removing Cabinet secretaries he had inherited from Lincoln.¹²⁸

During this drama French was mustered out of the Freedmen's Bureau effective January 1 in the course of a major thinning of military ranks. Like many Bureau officers he retained his position under the status of civilian agent, but when Johnson was impeached he resigned to join the throng of abolitionists who flocked to Washington to lobby the Senate to convict. They argued that the executive deliberately and defiantly refused to implement law passed by Congress and that his conciliation toward Southern whites who oppressed and murdered freedpeople was tantamount to treason. Radicals in Southern states like French staked all their hopes on the impeachment of Johnson, believing that Johnson's presidency kept the restless spirit of rebellion alive. If he was removed, they believed that Southern whites would yield, defeated, before the demands of reconstruction. If he remained in office, Unionists would literally have to flee for their lives. "If the Lord shall see that we can settle up our national affairs without blood, then Mr Johnson will be deposed," French wrote. "But if a baptism of blood upon the land be necessary to the establishment, not of peace so much as *justice*, then Mr Johnson will be acquitted & we shall have the baptism, & have it quickly!"¹²⁹

After visiting Grant in Washington with Henry Wilson, French went on to New York in mid-March to get as many newspaper editors as possible to print the reasons that

¹²⁸ McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 381-84; Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 380-81.

¹²⁹ John and LaWanda Cox, "General O. O. Howard and the 'Misrepresented Bureau,'" *Journal of Southern History* 19, no. 4 (November 1953): 441-42; M. French to H. French, November 28, 1867, FFP; H. J. McCain to Mansfield J. French, Feb. 14, 1916, attached to C. H. Bridges to M. J. French, May 14, 1931, FFP; "General Orders, No. 2" (3F31-010), FFP; E. W. Littlesey to R. K. Scott, Feb. 19, 1868 (copy), FFP; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 383-85; Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 389-91; M. French to A. French, April 11, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, May 9, 1868, FFP.

Johnson deserved conviction, believing that “[t]he press must ring like so many funeral bells, till the dead carcass is buried.” “Impeachment must be pushed *strongly, pertinently & majestically* and *expeditiously*.” On April 1 he persuaded the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to appoint a committee to issue a strong statement urging Johnson’s conviction, and the following day he did the same with the New York East Conference. The whole denomination was publicly turning against Johnson. Its periodicals denounced him, and in May, just before the Senate’s vote, the General Conference meeting in Chicago offered prayers “to save our senators from error” from “corrupt influences.” Although a motion to pray explicitly for Johnson’s removal was defeated, no one misunderstood what the less direct supplication meant.¹³⁰

One problem for the House managers of Johnson’s impeachment was, to beat all ironies, Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. Republicans had a very weak legal case against Johnson; their hope was to make the trial a political case over Johnson’s fitness to govern. Chase, however, insisted on administering the proceedings as a legal trial. What looked like his defection from the radical clique further weakened the House managers’ cause and also took a heavy toll on Chase’s future political ambitions (although French never lost affection for him and hoped in vain for his future election). In the end, seven Republican senators believed that the president had committed no crime and voted with the Democrats to acquit. Johnson escaped removal from office by one vote.¹³¹

¹³⁰ M. French to H. French, March 17, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 21, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, April 1, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, April 2, 1868, FFP; Norwood, *Story of American Methodism*, 247; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 315-16.

¹³¹ Trefousse, *Radical Republicans*, 391-92; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, April 22, 1868, FFP; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, June 8, 1868, SPC.

Campaign for Senate

French had left Washington more than a month before Johnson was exonerated, principally concerned not with the president's political fortunes but with his own. James Harlan was one of Johnson's Cabinet secretaries who resigned his position after Johnson broke with Congress in 1866; he was now representing Iowa again in the Senate. In early April 1868, once French returned to Washington from New York, Harlan had a private conversation with French about radical Republicans' problem in South Carolina.

Whenever Congress would bless South Carolina's new constitution and readmit the state to the Union, as was imminently expected, its new legislature would convene and as its first order of business elect two men to the United States Senate, one to a truncated term and the other to a full six years. The two principal candidates for the full term, Albert Gallatin Mackey and F. A. Sawyer, were not to radicals' liking. Mackey was an erudite physician and planter, a staunch Unionist, and one of the very few of the planter class to embrace Republicanism after the Union triumph. He was rewarded with the most lucrative patronage job in the state, that of Collector of the Port of Charleston; he also served capably as the president of the state constitutional convention. Radicals trusted no native white South Carolinian, certainly not one who owned slaves until Sherman's invasion tore through the state. Sawyer, a Northern educator, had another plum patronage job as the Collector of Internal Revenue in Charleston. A former Democrat, he maintained unusually good relations with native whites, which alarmed radicals as well. Therefore Harlan asked French to run against Mackey and Sawyer as a candidate for the

Senate from South Carolina.¹³²

French was stunned, although rumors to this effect that he dismissed as “air castles” had been floating around Washington for at least a month. Then, as now, the office of United States senator was considered by most the luminous capstone of a political career; French, who had never held elected office, was being shown to the front of the line. He did not commit at once, but he did immediately return to Charleston to sound out his chances. He carried with him a letter of recommendation by Harlan to Robert K. Scott, who was a week away from being elected South Carolina’s first governor under its new constitution. Harlan was not a particularly prominent congressional radical, but a couple of those who were—Benjamin F. Wade and Henry Wilson—were among the eleven other Republicans who signed Harlan’s letter of recommendation. The letter was also signed by radical Kansas senator Samuel C. Pomeroy and moderate Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax, who was soon to become Grant’s vice-presidential running mate.¹³³

By April 20 French decided to run. Two factors had the most influence on his decision. First, his coterie in South Carolina, especially Governor Scott, was convinced that he would win. The Republican caucus in the legislature—which made up almost the

¹³² Williamson, *After Slavery*, 358, 364, 374, 376; John Porter Hollis, “The Early Period of Reconstruction in South Carolina,” *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science* 23, nos. 1-2 (January–February 1905): 85; “Legislative Proceedings,” *Charleston Daily News*, July 16, 1868; “Further News by Mail,” *Charleston Daily News*, July 17, 1868; *Beaufort Tribune*, March 22, 1876; James Harlan to Robert K. Scott, April 7, 1868, FFP.

¹³³ M. J. French to M. French, March 4, 1868, FFP; William R. Brock, *An American Crisis: Congress and Reconstruction, 1865–1867* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 53; M. French to A. French, April 15, 1868, FFP; James Harlan to Robert K. Scott, April 7, 1868, FFP. French managed to get back to South Carolina on the government’s dime by securing a reappointment to the Freedmen’s Bureau for one week without pay from Oliver Otis Howard; see Oliver Otis Howard to M. French, April 7, 1868, FFP.

whole body—was composed of blacks and white Northerners, many of them radical. No white person in South Carolina was as beloved by blacks as Mansfield French, and many transplanted (also known as “carpetbag”) Northerners may have been as skeptical of Mackey and Sawyer as Harlan was.¹³⁴

The second factor in French’s decision, however, was his gloomy view of conditions in the South three years after the end of the Civil War:

[The South] is farther off from reconstruction today than ever. Restoration of her representation in Congress does not restore her. Her ministry, her merchants, planters & general intelligence & influence are all arraigned against the government & against the colored people & loyal whites. It seems as though Providence would not allow any scheme of restoration succeed so long as we have failed to punish traitors, & make treason odious. The South is demoralized & but for the presence of our troops no northern man could remain a day, except at his peril. If he were to attempt to bring around him the protection of the colored men, it would only enrage them the more. . . . Not more than 80 or 100 whites in Charleston voted for the Constitution. This is a *sad* thought. How can ignorance & poverty succeed against intelligence, wealth, intrigue & skilled diplomacy? If they do, the struggle will be a hard & long one.¹³⁵

If the hostility of most whites toward blacks and Unionist whites was not bad enough, the condition of those two loyal elements was even more discouraging. French had always been at the leading edge of campaigning for full rights for blacks, although in early 1867 he preferred an “intelligence” (probably literacy) qualification to apply equally to white and black voters instead of universal suffrage. Now, however, for the first time since arriving in the South, French expressed serious pessimism over blacks’ aptitude for participation in government:

¹³⁴ Letters of M. French to A. French, April 15, 1868, April 17, 1868, May 7, 1868, May 9, 1868, May 14, 1868, FFP.

¹³⁵ M. French to A. French, April 17, 1868, FFP.

While these people are, & will be, true to the Union so far [as] they can understand, they are not true to each other. I mean the colored & whites who are loyal. They are not reliable. They make solemn agreements to go for this man, or that man, in caucus tonight, & tomorrow go for another. Slavery has taught them all the arts of treachery. I fear this may be the last general election they will ever carry. So many unworthy whites have got nominations that it is discouraging. They do not seem able to appreciate character at all. I pity them all the more, as I fear they will be duped by their old masters. A master, kind in the ordinary acceptance of the word, they have a hundredfold more respect for, than some of the “carpetbaggers,” & so have I.¹³⁶

French concluded that he had to run for Senate, because he believed that if he was elected, he would be one of the only principled politicians in the state. He considered himself one of the few who would look out of blacks’ interests over his own. And he believed that a senatorship would further empower and extend his ministry of educating blacks about the virtues required by freedom, which in his view they needed more than ever:

The people seem not to have any adequate knowledge of their condition, in any forecast of their dangers in the future. They must depend on others. Many of them are not capable at all of judging as to who is competent to protect or properly advise them. Designing, selfish men appeal to their prejudices, try to weaken their confidence in good men, and I am sorry to say, with great success. I could not from consideration of either the honor, or salary, of a Senator, consent to take a chance among the aspirants for the Senate. But I see reasons that are noble, philanthropic, humane & that bear upon the peace & prosperity of not only the South, but the whole country, as well as upon the liberties of the poor freedmen, why I should seek that position.

His selling points were “*ability* to help the State to obtain capital & immigration, to *harmonize* the races, to protect the freedmen, & to defend their rights, & to be a friend & helper at Washington.” He was eagerly supported by men he worked with in and through

¹³⁶ M. French to A. French, April 17, 1868, FFP; Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 7, 1867, SPC. Cf. Benjamin, “Methodist Episcopal Church,” in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 371-74. French complains of freedpeople’s liability to be sucked in by scoundrels in strong terms in letters from M. French to A. French, May 15, 1868, June 7, 1868, July 1, 1868, July 9, 1868, FFP.

the Freedmen's Bureau like James P. Low, A. P. Ketchum, Reuben Tomlinson (now a legislator-elect), and Francis Cardozo (a biracial, Charleston-born, Edinburgh-educated minister soon to become South Carolina's Secretary of State). These fanned out through the state to campaign on French's behalf, and on rare occasions he spoke for himself. Meanwhile for some of this period Austa lodged in Washington and served as French's go-between with his congressional allies.¹³⁷

French had strongly mixed feelings about his candidacy. He had a powerful sense of duty to the welfare of South Carolina's blacks, but he was daunted by the magnitude of what was required to make the state a hospitable place for them to flourish, and he dreaded doing it. He was confident that he was going to win, but he could not quite make himself believe that he, of all people, would attain to that lofty station. He had been engaged in politics since he went to Port Royal, sometimes in underhanded or at least backchannel ways, but the politics of campaigning and serving as an elected lawmaker was a different animal, and French was disgusted even to be around it to the point of wanting to back out. "I pity the men who have to wire-pull for themselves," he wrote Austa. "I never could do it. It is well God has given me friends to do that work, or it would *never be done*." He sincerely hoped that none of his friends would sustain moral damage in the process.¹³⁸

French was most appalled by ceaseless rumors of bribery that floated to him throughout the campaign. Since senators were indirectly elected, candidates actually had

¹³⁷ Letters from M. French to A. French, April 20, 1868, May 9, 1868, May 14, 1868, May 15, 1868, May 18, 1868, FFP.

¹³⁸ Letters from M. French to A. French, date unknown (1868), May 14, 1868, May 15, 1868, May 18, 1868, May 20, 1868, June 7, 1868, June 20, 1868, July 9, 1868, FFP.

only one constituency to cater to: the small number of men who constituted the state legislature. These might be influenced by appealing to their constituencies, but they were much more easily persuaded by offering gifts. Word was out that Sawyer, financed by Northern capitalists, was spreading money around as early as October 1867, even before the legislature was elected. Again and again French wrote that Sawyer and Mackey were corrupting legislators right and left and that if he lost, only his unwillingness to bribe lawmakers was to blame. He had no money to bribe with, and even if he did he refused to use it that way, because it directly contradicted the political education of the freedpeople that he considered his mission. A letter he wrote to Austa on July 9 expresses these ideas in typical fashion:

New pages in the heart of men are unfolded, & new insights are given me as to the character of men, particularly the freedmen. I see more clearly why the “forty years” of sifting & hardening, or developing rather, were needed for the freedmen of Egypt. What are ignorance & poverty, before money? Oh how strong is the money, if attended with intelligence. Men can be bought & sold the same day—It is affirmed that the speaker of the House, (white & a native) pledged himself solemnly to vote for Sawyer only two days ago, & yesterday was supporting Mackey *heart & soul*. My heart pains me when I see in almost everyone, so much looseness of conscience. I have a few friends of principle who will stand like a rock—A man must have a *pure* Christian heart to labor *for*, & *with* this people. It is a dangerous field for a man who has not such a Christian heart.

I want you to be prepared to hear of my *failure*. I have not *money*—& if I had God would curse me for corrupting men for the sake of their votes—If I fail, you know we shall be *poor enough*. . . . I pity these people—not being *rooted & grounded*, thoroughly in moral principle & surrounded by corruptors who are intelligent, they must be greatly duped & injured.¹³⁹

French idealistically—and nobly—tried to win the election by promoting sound

¹³⁹ Robert K. Scott to M. French, October 6, 1867, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, April 20, 1868, May 18, 1868, May 20, 1868, June 11, 1868, June 16, 1868, July 1, 1868, July 8, 1868, July 9, 1868, FFP.

moral principles for the betterment of South Carolina. In early June, on his only visit to the upcountry, French gave a speech in Greenville that rehearsed long-held themes of God's providential activity in the nation as he understood it. He described the Civil War as God's instrument to devastate both North and South to the point that each section must abandon the sin of slavery, in which all the nation was complicit and from which both sections profited. This premise had an irenic corollary: there was no reason for each section to blame the other for the war. "So long as our eyes are upon the past, and we are censuring and antagonising each other, so long shall we fail to see, and reach the rewards of the golden, harmonious future that Providence opens before us." French saw a parallel between the nation's agonizing resistance to God's providential design for Universal Freedom and its current resistance to "Universal Enfranchisement." He asserted that as it had been during the war, the whole nation, North and South, would continue to suffer as long as it fought God's will. This was, however, a special warning to native whites hoping to regain power and limit the black vote and to blacks who might be tempted to shrink from casting a ballot in the face of intimidation. It also provided the springboard for French to instruct blacks in his audience to prove their worthiness of suffrage "By qualifying yourselves for an intelligent use of it, and . . . By always casting your ballot for the right, & for honest & well-qualified men for office." French admonished,

See that you are not imposed upon, by crafty men. The office seeker, who would buy your vote, would sell you & your vote, whenever it would pay him well to do so. Beware of him, who offers you either the bottle or his money. If his past record, his character & his qualifications as a good moral citizen, are not sufficient to secure your confidence & your vote, refuse, not only, his bottle & his money, but refuse to trust him, with your liberties & the interests of society. One bad man, when accepted as a leader or counsellor, will do you more harm than all

your open enemies. He is indeed your worst enemy.

Some white Democrats listened warily, but as in Georgia three years earlier, French was better than they expected him to be—also as in 1865, they heard his moral exhortations to the freedpeople much more loudly than anything else he said.¹⁴⁰

Was French's perception of the Senate race correct—was he the principled candidate and the freedpeople's friend, destined to prevail unless corruption by his rivals outdid him? Clues can be found in two newspapers' coverage of the election in the legislature's first session after Congress finally admitted South Carolina back into the Union. The *Charleston Daily News* and the *Charleston Courier*¹⁴¹ were Democratic papers that spun lurid tales of the sleazy proceedings in order to delegitimize Republican rule as thoroughly as possible. Their accounts must be taken with a very large grain of salt, yet they do shed light on the dynamic of the contest.¹⁴²

A huge number of South Carolina's whites that were not disfranchised by Congress did not register to vote and boycotted the election. South Carolina's Republicans were virtually all black, so they essentially determined the composition of the whole legislature, but at the beginning of Reconstruction government across the South blacks tended to vote for whites rather than press for black leadership. Republican legislators in South Carolina were a roughly even mixture of blacks (concentrated in the

¹⁴⁰ Speech (3F30-014-022), FFP. See pp. 424-25 above.

¹⁴¹ The relevant article from the *Courier* is quoted from its reprint in the *Columbia Daily Phoenix* ("Parson French Has a Vision," July 21, 1868).

¹⁴² Two reasons for the ascent of corruption as a political issue after the Civil War, besides those previously mentioned, were Southern whites' agenda to tarnish Reconstruction governments in the eyes of Northern voters and policymakers, and Northern Democrats' desperate search for a winning issue over the dominant Republican Party. See Summers, *Era of Good Stealings*, xi.

lower house) and whites (in the upper). The candidates were at pains to prove to the legislature that they were authentic Republicans and loyal to serving the desires of the black community. Here French had a decided advantage; his record spoke for itself, although his supporters were happy to recount it. The *Daily News* considered his weaknesses to be his support from Washington, his sanctimony, and his awful speaking style—all of which were probably assets with most of the legislature. His rivals had more serious liabilities. Mackey's camp tried hard to paint Sawyer as a snobbish Democrat. Sawyer's and French's men together caricatured Mackey as a flamboyant johnny-come-lately to Unionism and attacked the oligarchic grip he was using his family and inner ring to set on state politics. This charge was laid with delicious wit by the famed captain of the *Planter*, Robert Smalls, a state representative rapidly ascending to the pinnacle of lowcountry politics and a French supporter (even though French, believing Smalls to be on the take, privately disdained him as "a bad man"):

Gentlemen had said Mr. Mackey was a good Republican. He certainly had not shown it, and if he had, he certainly had been rewarded. He held an office worth eight or ten thousand dollars a year, has all his sons and relations in office, and, in Heaven's name, what more did he want. For one, he [Smalls] did not desire to see the State of South Carolina changed to the State of Mackey.¹⁴³

The *Daily News* witnessed that money, promises of political appointments, and alcohol were "circulating freely" in Columbia in the days before the election. The correspondent was most disgusted that blacks and whites were having drinks and sharing

¹⁴³ "Further News by Mail," *Charleston Daily News*, July 17, 1868; Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South*, American Ways Series (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 120-21; "Legislative Proceedings," *Charleston Daily News*, July 16, 1868; Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 308-9; M. French to A. French, June 7, 1868, FFP. Smalls also referenced a letter purportedly written to him by famed radical general John C. Frémont endorsing Mackey. Smalls found it odd that he received the letter from a Mackey operative already opened and that it had been published in the newspaper before he received it.

cabs together and that “the white man has stepped aside from his level” by paying blacks respect in order to get cash or a committee appointment. The writer also derisively told of a stupid black legislator who changed his vote with every offer of money and alcohol until, suffering from a hangover, he wished he had stayed home. Cutting through the spin, it might be inferred from this description that French was correct: bribery was indeed rampant in the Senate race. However, it also indicates that, incredibly, racial integration was taking place in the seat of government of the staunchest proslavery state in the nation a mere three years after the institution was destroyed.¹⁴⁴

The correspondent sketched an intriguing picture of French’s campaign posture. He observed that French was more “modest” than his opponents in his “manner of seduction”; rather than speaking openly for himself he did almost all of his campaigning the old-fashioned way, through his allies. His supporters were known to bring legislators to visit French in small meetings in his quarters, where “[h]e is supposed to tell them that the Almighty has especially selected him to represent the State of South Carolina in the United States Senate” and to threaten lawmakers with eternal damnation if they did not vote for him. At the close of the meetings French’s supporters escorted legislators to have a drink and a smoke, “because not being a drinking or a smoking man himself, he has let the job out on contract.” What exactly French told lawmakers is unknown; it is doubtful that he made any claim to his providential ascension to the Senate so bluntly, as he was much more tentative in his letters. Yet there is little doubt that he made frequent reference to divine providence over the state, over the nation, and over himself in some form or

¹⁴⁴ “From the State Capitol,” *Charleston Daily News*, July 16, 1868; “Further News by Mail,” *Charleston Daily News*, July 17, 1868.

another. French was campaigning on his dyed-in-the-wool loyalty to radical Republicanism, and his handlers strategized that by preventing either Sawyer or Mackey from winning a majority, French might win over supporters from both sides as the compromise candidate since members of neither camp would defect to the other.¹⁴⁵

French and his friends greatly miscalculated. On the first ballot in the Senate Sawyer had fifteen votes, Mackey nine, and French five. In the House of Representatives Mackey began with fifty, Sawyer thirty-four, French twenty-four, and a Democratic candidate was supported by all fourteen members of his party in the legislature. This was far less support than French anticipated. Also, despite the abundant stories (that French himself believed) about treacherous, easily bought lawmakers switching sides to the highest bidder at the drop of a hat, repeated ballots in joint session showed little movement. What movement there was, however, was a gradual siphoning of votes from French to his rivals, mostly to Sawyer. To French's chagrin, some of the men who had encouraged him to enter the race were revealed to be backing other candidates.¹⁴⁶

According to the *Charleston Courier*, that night French sent a written proposal to Sawyer requesting Sawyer's surrender and his backing in the name of principle and patriotism since French was the best man for the job. The *Courier* claimed to quote part of French's "pronunciamento" to the effect that God had ordained French to the position. Again, the quotation itself is highly dubious, but it rings true as a statement of how

¹⁴⁵ "Further News by Mail," *Charleston Daily News*, July 17, 1868; M. French to A. French, May 20, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 9, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 8, 1868, FFP.

¹⁴⁶ "Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina," July 15, 1868, FFP; "From the State Capitol," "Legislative Proceedings," *Charleston Daily News*, July 16, 1868; "Further News by Mail," *Charleston Daily News*, July 18, 1868.

French's overture was received. That French would make this proposition is entirely believable. Unsurprisingly, Sawyer, having twice French's votes, turned down French's demand.¹⁴⁷

In the first ballot on the second day of voting, French had twenty-seven votes in the joint session of the legislature; Mackey and Sawyer each had roughly twice as many. French was proud of his "Spartan Band," but he concluded that they could not succeed unless they took part in bribery too. The election was going nowhere. At French's direction, the senator who nominated him retracted his name. Most of French's men swung behind Sawyer, and South Carolina's first full-term, postwar United States senator, a Northern conservative Republican, was elected to the office.¹⁴⁸

French believed that he lost because of his opponents' graft, although he was not bitter about the outcome. He was not wrong, but he was not completely right. He also lost because of his late start—Mackey and Sawyer had been forming their blocs for months before French came on the scene. In addition, French displayed amazing blind spots. He gravitated to administration politics, where he could be positively conniving, but he was uncomfortable and obtuse in electoral politics. For years he had been an ostentatious publicist to the point of self-promotion, but he balked at using that talent in perhaps the situation where it made the most sense. His staunch refusal to bribe lawmakers was noble, but he also seems to have rejected making any promises to use his influence to secure committee or patronage appointments for his supporters. Taken to a certain degree

¹⁴⁷ "Parson French Has a Vision," *The Daily Phoenix*, July 21, 1868.

¹⁴⁸ "Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina," July 16, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 20, 1868, FFP.

that practice could certainly violate the public interest, but to consider performing those favors to be inherently unethical may have been extreme. Moreover, in the era after the inauguration of the spoils system and before civil service reform, it was the name of the game; no politician got elected without playing it. Strangest of all, if French had a problem giving favors, he had no problem getting them. French's government career was filled with petitions that he made to powers-that-be on behalf of his agenda. Others might have seen his position in the Department of the South as a patronage job, although he did not view it that way. But there is no other way to interpret the government jobs that his sons won, probably with his help—in one case through his relationship with Salmon P. Chase a week before Gideon's Band left the dock for Port Royal in 1862.¹⁴⁹

French lost the race, but he was perhaps more relieved than disappointed. He left Columbia immediately and headed north for the last time, and he never looked back.¹⁵⁰

French's Public Service: An Appraisal

Before moving on to the eight years of French's life after his public service, it is worthwhile to take stock of what French accomplished in his whirlwind six years of government employment. With Edward L. Pierce, French won approval for massive humanitarian relief of contrabands in South Carolina. This became a laboratory and seedbed for emancipation that made a significant impact on Northern public opinion and policymaking. His involvement as a publicist garnered a flood of Northern philanthropy, aid workers, and teachers—especially women—to the project, mostly from New York.

¹⁴⁹ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 28, 1862, Port Royal Correspondence, pp. 76-77.

¹⁵⁰ M. French to A. French, July 20, 1868, FFP.

He supervised the educational aspect of the mission, through which thousands of children and adults learned to read and do arithmetic. He took a leading role in legalizing Southern blacks' marriages on terms that he believed provided the greatest support for dependent women and children. He won the first authorization issued by the federal government to enlist blacks en masse as soldiers in the United States Army. His public promotion of blacks' courage under fire in the November 1862 coastal raid helped to increase Northerners' appreciation for black manhood. He was among those who persuaded the Lincoln administration to set aside some land for a small number of black families to have their own homesteads, a dream he made possible for others by securing a loan from Jay Cooke to Robert K. Scott's land brokerage. He facilitated the emergence of self-governed black churches in South Carolina at the nexus of Northern denominational missions and the federal government.

These are genuine and undeniable achievements. Nevertheless, one wonders if they might have come about without him. Pierce took the larger role in getting the Port Royal Experiment off the ground; New York would likely have gotten involved in the effort some other way, although without the city's evangelicals' large hand at the beginning, its outcome may have been different in unknown ways. The success of freedpeople's education hardly rested on French's supervision, which was rather spotty. Other ministers traveling with Union troops all over the South solemnized blacks' marriages, and other bureaucrats and denominational officials got black congregations on their feet. The number of blacks who got permanent title to their own land directly stemming from French's exertions was hardly transformative. The approval French won

for Saxton to arm up to five thousand black troops was French's most tangible accomplishment, but it also had the least to do with him. Unknown to French, military necessity and political dynamics in the Lincoln administration disposed Edwin M. Stanton to grant that request at that time no matter who presented it. Swollen with misplaced confidence in his own influence, French tried and failed to secure permission for all government land on the Sea Islands to be preempted by black settlers. Again, this failure had comparatively little to do with French's ineptitude and much to do with a political duel between Lincoln and Salmon P. Chase of which French was ignorant.

Perhaps French's greatest accomplishment in his six years in the South is the hardest to measure. French was an unflagging, much attended-to, and much beloved encourager of blacks emerging from slavery and taking their first steps in freedom. His ability to grip blacks' attention, commiserate with their trials, direct them to virtuous conduct, and above all give them hope was unsurpassed. Given the chaos and danger in which emancipation came about and the severe opposition that blacks faced long afterward, this was no small thing. In fact, it probably saved lives—there is no telling how many more deaths might have resulted from violence, disease, starvation, and exposure if French's words had not brought a modicum of peace and stability to troubled Georgia in 1865.

Of course, French failed in some of his efforts as well. He never saw an all-black army of liberation unleashed in the Deep South. His marriage work in South Carolina was disrupted at the intersection of Oliver O. Howard's order and James Orr's policy. Andrew Johnson was not convicted. French lost his campaign for a seat in the United

States Senate. He never lived to see a fully integrated Methodist Episcopal Church. His most obvious defeat, which he shared with all the abolitionist-radicals of his generation, was the failure to secure title to land for freedpeople on a wide scale. The best-known of his many attempts—the preemption drama—had as perhaps its chief result lasting bitterness among all parties at Port Royal, especially the betrayed blacks themselves. In that case, the freedpeople’s disappointment directly descends from French and his co-conspirators’ promises, which they were in no position to make and had no power to deliver on.

If all of French’s efforts to win land for freedpeople had succeeded, would it have enabled the elevation and social strength of blacks as French believed it would? Probably not, at least not to the degree that he expected. Blacks would have gained the liberty to shape their work lives themselves, to plant the crops that they wanted for cash or food and to do it when and how they pleased. Yet as Eric Foner argues, small white farmers in the postwar South already had this freedom, and their plight proved that it was no panacea. Land without access to credit and markets does not yield prosperity. Land without political power can subject the small landholder to hostile economic policies by the ruling elite. Furthermore, if blacks had abandoned cash crops on a large scale and farmed at a subsistence level—a significant possibility—the Southern economy would have been devastated even more severely, and everyone in the region, including black farmers, would have been affected. In addition, the timing of radicals’ land proposals could not have been worse: bad weather, insect infestation, and falling cotton prices in 1866 and 1867 leveled the few independent black farmers on the Sea Islands; even their

corn failed, threatening them with starvation. On the other hand, large-scale land redistribution could not but have altered the balance of power in a permanent way, limiting the influence of the elite and strengthening the confidence of freedpeople. Furthermore, blacks and the whites who sought to help them knew that access to the South's wealth-generating resources was critical to sustain the gains in the noneconomic areas of blacks' lives.¹⁵¹

Turning from how French's activities impacted his world, how did they impact French himself? In some ways, his sojourn in the South was his finest hour. His compassion for the oppressed and his commitment to do something about their oppression at his own risk put most of us to shame. His perseverance was astounding. And the sincerity of his devotion to the principles of Universal Freedom and the full humanity of all races, however logical they might seem to many today, was shocking to his contemporaries, even to those who assented to the same ideals. Few people act out their beliefs with the abandon of Mansfield French.

At the same time, the combination of his zeal and the extreme pressures of the Civil War and its aftermath revealed ugly character qualities not apparent before or after his years in the South. Whether due to interreligious misunderstanding, his self-importance, or both, French was frequently perceived as pompous, and he alienated coworkers who might have been allies. He was cavalier with the truth, sometimes intentionally. He slandered people that he regarded as obstacles behind their backs. The size and responsibility of the operations that he endeavored to manage stretched his

¹⁵¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 125-27.

careless fiscal practices beyond the breaking point.

Arguably French's biggest moral problem was his tunnel vision. He absolutized black uplift with such a vengeance that he steeply relativized everything else. This appears in his staggeringly swift swing from pacifism to advocacy for a level of severity in the conduct of war that even William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan did not countenance (at least until they took on American Indians).¹⁵² It also affected his interpersonal relationships. French defined both justice for blacks and the means that he believed were necessary to achieve it as the be-all, end-all. Anyone who stood in the way, like William Henry Brisbane, was an immoral enemy, and all who supported his efforts, like Abram D. Smith, were righteous friends—and this despite Smith's well-known drinking problem, which to a Methodist like French was one of the most despicable human behaviors.¹⁵³ By unconsciously making agreement with his agenda, however good it was, his sole moral criterion, French's ability to assess character plummeted. Reuben Tomlinson later profited from a colossal railroad scam while simultaneously serving as the company's treasurer and South Carolina's attorney general. Samuel C. Pomeroy, whose relationship with French continued after 1868, was perhaps the most notoriously corrupt politician of the Grant era. Both of Grant's vice presidents, Schuyler Colfax and Henry Wilson, were implicated in the infamous Crédit Mobilier railroad scandal. Robert K. Scott's gubernatorial administration was deluged with allegations of debauchery and corruption (at least some accurate, all politically motivated), especially pertaining to the

¹⁵² Stout, *Upon the Altar*, 536.

¹⁵³ Cf. M. French, *The Lord and the Distillers. Who Got the Corn?* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, n.d.).

land commission that he erected to enable more freedpeople to buy their own property. This is hardly surprising given Scott's willingness to profit from land dealing to blacks while serving as Assistant Commissioner in the Freedmen's Bureau.¹⁵⁴ It is probably good that French was not elected senator. It is unlikely that he would have taken cash in a straight-up quid pro quo; his antagonism to outright bribery was too high. But in light of his friends, his financial needs, his comfort with receiving favors and benefits by virtue of his public activity, and the soaring scale of the gifts distributed to officials in the railroad era, it is probable that French would have entangled himself in a subtler sort of venality in office to a significant extent—plausibly even with *Crédit Mobilier*.

If he had done so, it might have been out of naïveté. It must be remembered that throughout this period French believed himself to be entirely sanctified, which meant that he committed no conscious sin at any time. Wesley's doctrine allowed that a perfected believer might still err in judgment if not in intent; he also taught, however, that a single such misstep requires eternal damnation if not for the blood of Christ and should certainly be repented of if discovered. Yet this facet of teaching on holiness was downplayed in the mid-nineteenth century; it certainly made little appearance in *Beauty of Holiness*.

French's belief system, therefore, encouraged moral recklessness—both uncompromising aggressiveness to do the right he knew and unconcerned negligence about the wrong he did not recognize. As with many human beings, French's strength was his weakness; in his case, his tunnel vision, driven by both his beliefs and his temperament, led him into

¹⁵⁴ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 309; Summers, *Era of Good Stealings*, 38; Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 319-20; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 463; *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Scott, Robert Kingston"; Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 156-57. Scott later went home to Ohio to work in land brokerage there; when he shot dead a man whom he believed had gotten his son drunk and claimed that his firearm discharged accidentally, a local jury exonerated the war hero.

significant sins, but he never would have done what he did for oppressed blacks without it.

Ironically, French's tunnel vision also excluded from his view one of its foundations: Holiness dogma itself. From the day French visited Chase in Washington about investigating the conditions of the contrabands in 1862, not once did French mention sanctification in his abundant documentary remains until after he left the South for the last time. This was the doctrine and experience that led him into Methodism and spurred him to quit running his seminary in order to preach; this was the teaching that he was promoting as a full-time magazine publisher when he departed for Port Royal; yet it was absent from his lips and his thoughts for six years. French had held to evangelical doctrine about conversion for longer still, going all the way back to his days as a student in Vermont forty years before. Yet the mighty evangelist did not claim a single convert in his years in the South, nor did he go looking for one.

To this evangelical author, French's neglect is appalling in its own right, but it hints at a tragedy that nonevangelicals might also appreciate. One of the roots of the many evident problems in the postwar South—indeed, in the whole nation—was a defect in the hearts of white Americans, who considered blacks inherently inferior and their presence as peers in white society a defilement. The best economic and social policies that a right-minded and coordinated government might produce, despite how crucial they were for blacks to flourish, could never solve that problem. French went South with a tool with known power to alter radically the attitudes of the heart—his gospel—and he was highly adept at wielding it. Yet at no time in the South did he preach conversion and

sanctification to Southern whites—or even to callous Northerners—and apply the gospel’s demands to their racist animus. Amid all his militarism, that weapon remained in its sheath. In 1868 French left the freedpeople of South Carolina to survive among a hostile white populace whose hearts remained unchanged.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAILED TRANSITION (1868-76)

“Our effort to get means has made us *poor indeed*.”

—Mansfield French to Austa French (1870)

Austa French and *Beauty of Holiness*

In order to understand what French came home to in the summer of 1868, it is necessary to retrace Austa French's steps from the time she left Port Royal six years earlier.

Austa's principal goal on her return was to publish *Slavery in South Carolina*. After a few dead ends, Mansfield reluctantly (fearing he would lose money on the project) agreed to publish it himself under their son Winchell's management and name.¹ Then it was back to work editing *Beauty of Holiness*, which had been floating on a backlog of material while the Frenches were away from New York. In the months that followed, the magazine went through a striking transformation. Mansfield was so absorbed in his work on the islands—even the page count in this thesis bears witness to the intensity of the year 1862—that he took almost no part in the magazine's publication at all, and soon he made no written contributions to it. Austa filled its pages entirely as she saw fit. As a result, the couple, now separated by miles, quickly separated by interest as well. Just as Mansfield's zeal for freedom detached from holiness, Austa's zeal for holiness detached from freedom. It was not that her ethical and political opinions

¹ See pp. 258-61; M. French to A. French and W. French, June 13, 1862, French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY.

changed, nor did his religious ones—far from it. Yet in the same way that holiness fell out of Mansfield's speaking, emancipation fell out of Austa's writing and editing. Within a year, one would scarcely read in *Beauty of Holiness* that the war was God's instrument to release slaves from freedom. The only way the magazine bore witness to the war at all was in Austa's deep concern for the spiritual condition of Union soldiers and in their many testimonies of how the *Beauty* encouraged them to believe God for holiness in the camp. Otherwise the magazine's subject matter was essentially the same as it had been in 1856 before Mansfield became outspoken on slavery.²

Nevertheless, Austa faced three major challenges as she pressed on in her crusade for holiness. First, the economic conditions of the war put heavy stress on magazines, driving many out of business. Both the price of paper and the cost of printing doubled; in February 1863 the Frenches shrunk the magazine from thirty-two to twenty-four pages per issue. In addition, inflation soaked up disposable income that readers put into magazine subscriptions; the number of subscribers to the *Beauty* sunk from almost ten thousand at the beginning of 1861 to four thousand by 1864, and many who still had a subscription were behind in paying for it. Second, this business climate required superlative management for the magazine to survive, but the help that the Frenches got to take Mansfield's place as publisher was spotty. Their son Winchell filled the gap to a significant degree, but he was unreliable, partly because of his other occupational pursuits and partly because of his character. At least twice they hired a substitute named Abbey

² That Mansfield only submerged but did not give up his beliefs about sanctification is demonstrated in this chapter. An example of Austa's consistent agreement with French's radical political views may be found in A. French to M. French, February 21, 1866, FFP. For *Beauty of Holiness's* content see the magazine 1862-64, *passim*.

who did not do as good a job as expected. On a few occasions, the Frenches' son-in-law George Lansing Taylor stepped in to pick up the slack amid his pastoral work; once French came north on leave to do it. Third, in the absence of a reliable clerk, Austa tried to shoulder the entire load of the magazine alone, which hurt both the business and herself. Austa was not competent to manage the details of the enterprise accurately, and in Mansfield's opinion her endeavors to do so caused the quality of her writing to deteriorate as well. Moreover, the workload on Austa, who was over age fifty, damaged her health. 1863 was a particularly bad year. The French family, especially Austa, believed in the "water cure" (a nineteenth-century homeopathic therapy that held that drinking spring waters with various mineral contents cured diseases), so Austa shuttled back and forth between New York City and Saratoga Springs, New York, a booming health resort town. While at Saratoga (as it was and is colloquially known), Austa tried to edit the magazine remotely.³

The disease that Austa suffered from and even its symptoms are unrecorded, and there is a chance that hypochondria was at play, but whatever her ailment was, it had a potent impact on the Frenches' decisions for the next several years. Her shaky health worried her husband deeply. In a classic (and in its own way, touching) case of the pot calling the kettle black, Mansfield was concerned about Austa's single-minded obsession

³ Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 93; *Beauty of Holiness in Heart and Life* 15, no. 4 (April 1864): inside front cover; M. French to A. French, February 29, 1863, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, May 27, 1863, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 14, 1863, FFP; William Shur to M. French, August 1, 1863, FFP; H. L. Abbey to M. French, August 14, 1863, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, August 26, 1863, FFP; M. French to W. French, September 3, 1863, FFP; A. French to M. French, September 21, 1863, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, September 30, 1863, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 2, 1863, FFP; M. French to A. French, January 14, 1864, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 16, 1864, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 26, 1864, FFP.

with her ministry and her unwillingness to conserve her strength prudently, instead throwing herself into her work with abandon. “If you were to be sick this summer, I fear, you would not recover,” he wrote in February 1863. “You seem so absorbed, so deeply wedded to the magazine, find your life, so much in it, that it alarms me. It seems too much as if you were *hastening* to the end of your labors.”⁴

It was in this context that the Frenches were confronted by another challenge posed to *Beauty of Holiness*: the interest of Walter and Phoebe Palmer, who in 1863 returned to the United States from a long tour in Britain. Phoebe had written numerous letters testifying to the revival that they participated in across the Atlantic; these were published monthly in both the *Beauty* and the *Guide to Holiness*. Now that the Palmers were back, they were interested in getting into the magazine business themselves. Even in good circumstances Phoebe Palmer’s popularity would have constituted a serious threat to the *Beauty*’s subscriber base; in the current business climate it was lethal.⁵

In the fall of 1863 the Palmers made overtures to the Frenches about buying *Beauty and Power of Holiness* (as the Frenches now called it, being uncomfortable with a title that quoted Scripture verbatim). Mansfield proceeded cautiously. He was grateful for what the Palmers were doing for the Holiness⁶ cause and believed that on the whole their interest in publishing was a good thing, because they would surely attract more people to the doctrine. He was even pleased that the Palmers thought enough of the *Beauty* to approach him and Austa. At the same time, he believed that Henry V. Degen of the *Guide*,

⁴ M. French to A. French, February 29, 1863, FFP.

⁵ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 92-93.

⁶ For the presence or absence of the capital “H” in “Holiness”/“holiness,” see p. viii n. 1.

overwhelmed by the same financial pressures the Frenches were trying to cope with, was looking to sell. If the Palmers got the *Guide*, Mansfield knew that it would drive the *Beauty* under. Worse, the Palmers were expected to move the Boston-based magazine to New York. This would effectively make the Palmers and the Frenches rivals and cause a considerable scandal within the Holiness clique in New York's Methodist community, and Mansfield feared that it would hurt the cause. The Palmers agreed with this analysis, but they did not back off, nor, it appears, did the Frenches guard their turf forthrightly. Mansfield was open to selling; the plight of blacks was too great for him to leave the Department of the South to rescue the *Beauty* from its peril, and he was much more anxious about Austa's survival than the magazine's. In the midst of his own crusade, *Beauty of Holiness* now meant little to him, and it was easy for him to let it go. Austa's attitude was far different. Mansfield was right: the magazine was her life, and she would not countenance giving it up. Yet she would not be straightforward about her refusal to her friend Phoebe Palmer, instead poorly concealing her resistance under the elliptical answer, "The Lord must direct." Mansfield left the decision about selling the magazine up to Austa, but he feared that she would make the wrong one.⁷

For a while the Palmers remained silent, but in April 1864 Walter Palmer and his son-in-law Elon Foster offered French 1,200 dollars for *Beauty and Power of Holiness*. The Palmers proposed to take on the responsibility for supplying issues for the rest of the current subscriptions while the Frenches would keep all the payments that had already

⁷ BH 14, no. 1 (January 1863): inside front cover; George Hughes, *Fragrant Memories of the Tuesday Meeting and the Guide to Holiness, and Their Fifty Years' Work for Jesus* (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1886), 175-77; M. French to A. French, November 2, 1863, FFP.

come in that year (about 2,700 subscriptions' worth at one dollar apiece). The Palmers also allowed Austa a certain amount of space for her own writing in each issue moving forward.⁸

At first, French was warm to the possibility. He thought that the offer was reasonable, and selling would relieve him and Austa of a substantial burden that they were struggling to meet. He also delighted in the thought of being reunited to his wife after two years of separation, because she could write for the magazine from anywhere, including Beaufort. French expected that sooner or later the Palmers would get the *Guide*, and he pointed out to Austa that she could write for triple the readers of a merged magazine than she was currently reaching through her own publication. Moreover, French knew that the Palmers were adamant about starting a magazine one way or another. Although both the Palmers and Mansfield French feared the effect of the rivalry that was bound to emerge, both parties acted as if it was the Frenches' duty to step aside, not the Palmers' duty to leave that role in the movement to someone else. After a bit more reflection, however, Mansfield changed his mind about the Palmers' offer. For one thing, he was no longer pleased with the purchase price Walter Palmer set. For another, in the aftermath of the failure of preemption and with Rufus Saxton's position on the islands in doubt, French considered giving up the Port Royal mission to return to New York, steer the magazine again, and regain lost ground.⁹ He believed that if he did so, the Palmers would decline to embarrass the cause by starting a rival publication, which French was

⁸ M. French to A. French, April 11, 1864, FFP.

⁹ See pp. 376.

sure would be cost-prohibitive to them.¹⁰

However, French did not come north, and in short order the Palmers got the magazine they wanted without starting their own. Walter Palmer and Elon Foster bought the *Guide to Holiness* for thirteen thousand dollars, even though only seven thousand subscribers were paying for their copies at the time. Phoebe Palmer was dubbed managing editor and Foster assistant editor. Now the pressure was on the Frenches to sell out or else scandalize New York's Methodists and be run out of business. Mansfield capitulated, selling *Beauty and Power of Holiness* and some office furniture to Walter Palmer for 2,300 dollars with the Frenches retaining the right of first refusal if the Palmers ever gave it up. By the terms of the contract, Austa's name appeared on the cover with the title "Corresponding Editress," and she was allowed up to three pages per issue to fill as she chose.¹¹

As has been seen repeatedly, French esteemed women's judgment to an unusual degree for men of his time, going all the way back to his days working with a female colleague as a teacher in Heath. This included his regard for Austa's opinions, which were instrumental in leading him into the blessing of perfect love. By 1869 and perhaps already in 1864, French even supported women's suffrage. Yet like his contemporaries he still very much believed that the husband was the head of his household, to which his policies for freedpeople's marriage and family arrangements testify. In the end Mansfield sold the magazine out of what he believed was his and Austa's best interest, but Austa

¹⁰ M. French to A. French, April 11, 1864, FFP; M. French to A. French, April 21, 1864, FFP.

¹¹ White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 93; Hughes, *Fragrant Memories*, 175-77; article of agreement, May 17, 1864, FFP (3F29-049).

never agreed with his decision. Despite Mansfield's insistence that Austa's power to influence others to holiness greatly increased by the move, even he knew that this was not what she wanted most. For both Austa French and Phoebe Palmer, who had been publishing through other channels for years, it was about control. Both of them demanded it, and neither willingly yielded it to the other. Writing for thirty thousand readers meant nothing to Austa if she could not shape her magazine the way she liked it.¹²

After the sale was finalized in New York, Mansfield said goodbye to Austa at the wharf before boarding a vessel for Port Royal in June 1864. He realized that he was leaving his wife with nothing but their almost-fourteen-year-old son Hamline; she had no permanent home, no magazine, no work, and no mission. She was heartbroken, and he knew it; at that moment he would have undone the sale if he could. Yet he consoled himself that she needed rest, and he consoled her that if they and the Palmers made a mistake, "if we all *feel right*, & do right each all will swing into the proper orbits again."¹³

If magazine subscriptions indicated the Palmers' proper orbit, then they had found it. With all the periodicals of the Holiness Movement consolidated under their family's control and powered by Phoebe's fame, the new, awkwardly named *Guide to and Beauty of Holiness* confounded the adverse business climate and began a meteoric rise to thirty-seven thousand subscribers by 1870. How Austa handled this at first is unclear, but at the beginning of 1866 the Palmers made a move that changed her forever. A new magazine

¹² H. French to M. French, October 1, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, April 11, 1864, FFP; A. French to M. French, date unknown (July 1869?, 3F35, "Your [*illegible*] last eve rec[eive]d . . ."), FFP.

¹³ M. French to A. French, June 6, 1864, FFP.

cover appeared bearing the title *Guide to and Beauty of Holiness, and Revival Miscellany*, but the more significant change was that Austa French's name no longer graced the magazine as corresponding editress.¹⁴

Austa was beside herself. She still faithfully attended the Palmers' famed Tuesday Meeting, and the couple pityingly invited the solitary woman to sit with them, but she was distraught within. She begged Mansfield in Charleston to write to Elon Foster and protest the violation of their agreement, but Mansfield did little or nothing. Eventually Austa summoned the pluck to ask the Palmer family directly for her name to be restored to the magazine. Phoebe refused to talk about it. Austa thought that Foster was hiding a guilty conscience, but she was disappointed. By her account, Foster explained that with the name change, the magazine was reconstituted as a new entity, and the Palmers' lawyer assured them that their article of agreement with the Frenches was thereby voided. Austa confessed to him that "parting with the *Beauty* was *the* trial of my life," but Foster was unsympathetic. He voiced the Palmers' displeasure that there were 1,500 fewer subscribers to the *Beauty* than the Frenches represented. Austa protested that she and Mansfield counted carefully and that Foster's accusation could not be true.¹⁵

Unfortunately, we do not have the Palmers' view of the affair in their own words; their private papers do not survive, and the published remarks by them and their contemporary admirers gloss facilely over the purchase of *Beauty of Holiness* as if in the providence of God it happened by itself without a hitch. Yet it seems in hindsight—and

¹⁴ Hughes, *Fragrant Memories*, 176-77; White, *Beauty of Holiness*, 93-94; *Guide to and Beauty of Holiness* (January 1866): cover; A. French to M. French, January 3, 1866, FFP.

¹⁵ A. French to M. French, January 3, 1866, FFP; A. French to M. French, February 5, 1866, FFP.

even seemed to some of the couples' mutual acquaintances—that the Palmers removed Austa French's name from the magazine as a way to remove Austa herself.¹⁶ Austa's language is intriguing, however, because although she was distressed over the erasure of her name, she did not mention losing her writing space in the pages of the magazine. In fact, whether due to poor health or grief over writing for someone else's magazine, Austa only used her page allotment three times in the eighteen issues between the Palmers' purchase and the cover change (in August 1864 and August and September 1865). The Palmers effectively made the outside of the *Guide* match the inside. In principle, Austa's literary career was about promoting the doctrine of entire sanctification, but what mattered to her in 1866 was whether her name was on the cover—Austa felt the wound more acutely in her vanity than in her productivity. One year later the Palmers completed the absorption by changing the magazine title again, this time to *Guide to Holiness and Revival Miscellany*. When the word “*Beauty*” disappeared from the cover, the last trace of Austa's handiwork disappeared.

Whatever the Palmers' reasons, Austa was left to cope with a loss that she was powerless to prevent or restore. She asked the Palmers to read their agreement over again and pray about it. She put on a brave face and told Foster she “would still help them all I could.” She tried to put the matter behind her—the week after the confrontation she went to the Tuesday Meeting and testified confidently, leaving the whole matter in the hands of God and being completely “cordial” to Walter and Phoebe Palmer. She dismissed the loss of the magazine and focused her energy on writing a new work to “lead seekers to Jesus.”

¹⁶ Hughes, *Fragment Memories*, 175-77; A. French to M. French, January 13, 1866, FFP.

But sadly, Austa was caught in a trap bounded by the doctrine of entire sanctification and set by her own testimony of perfection in love. In order to be legitimately sanctified, she could not be conscious of committing any willful sin (though a degree of hairsplitting between “sin” and acceptable “error” was tolerated). Practically, this meant that she could admit hurt, but she could not admit vengeful anger toward those who hurt her without losing her reputation and standing within her social circle, because both the circle and her position in it were defined by the doctrine and the status that accompanied testifying to the blessing. In the world of nineteenth-century Holiness, to discover within oneself and reject a previously unrecognized sin (like self-righteousness or hypocrisy, two of the iniquities that Jesus declaimed against most severely) was not a sign of spiritual progress but regress. The result for Austa was unshakable—and carefully unexamined—confidence that she “never loved [the Palmers] more.” She attempted to validate this by going out of her way to be positive and helpful to her betrayers while at the same time indulging fantasies of God’s retribution on them for the betrayal. When she confronted the Palmers she was bold enough to remind them that “we should soon all be in the other world” and that it did not matter what a lawyer said about their agreement but “what God considered right.” As the weeks passed Austa became more and more bitter. She took painful pleasure in the words of “[e]very sister” that the magazine was “not so grand as it was” when Austa managed it, and she insisted on lamenting its demise even as subscriptions soared. She blamed the Palmers for paying her and Mansfield less than the *Beauty* was worth. Above all, she took solace in her conviction that God would mete out judgment on the Palmer family “ere three years pass.” In fact, she did not wait—in March

1866 Walter and Phoebe Palmer and Elon Foster were all laid low with terrible colds, and Austa, remaining “cordial,” was satisfied that “[t]he Lord is dealing with them.” By the end of the year “[t]he Lord ha[d] shown” Austa that Foster and Phoebe Palmer would not “be in this world long unless they do me justice.”¹⁷

In addition to the trial of the magazine, Austa was going through a very difficult time in other ways in 1866. Hamline was away at school, and Austa was boarding alone in Brooklyn, where she knew no one. She kept crossing the East River to impale herself on the Palmers’ hospitality at the Tuesday Meeting in New York, but now she felt ignored, no longer respected by her friends as she had been as a magazine editor. She was also broke. What money she received from Mansfield she passed on almost entirely to Hamline, and she played the martyr by professing that she could not bear to see their son go without no matter what her own deprivation. As a result, to her mortification she fell into deepening arrears in her board bill. At the same time, Mansfield was scraping together the money to bail out William Hannehan’s cotton operation instead of sending it to her.¹⁸ Austa took out her vindictiveness on him, asserting that she could never “oppress” anyone as Mansfield did—by implication both his black employees(!) and herself. Austa thought that she was exceedingly frugal and that Mansfield was spendthrift. Her evaluation was at least partly warranted; contrasting family and cultural backgrounds were at play, and Austa filled well the stereotype of the tight-fisted Yankee

¹⁷ Letters from A. French to M. French, January 13, 1866, February 5, 1866, February 9, 1866, February 21, 1866, March 19, 1866, March 26, 1866, December 11, 1866, FFP. Cf. R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology: An Historical Study of the Christian Ideal for the Present Life* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 332-36.

¹⁸ See pp. 457-59.

while Mansfield evinced western Vermont liberality.¹⁹ Yet Austa had blind spots too—although she fed herself parsimoniously, she bought and consumed reading material voraciously, and she had an abiding weakness for clothing, so much so that she used *Beauty of Holiness* to defend her small departures from the severe plainness in dress that was standard in Methodist piety.²⁰ Nevertheless, Austa was convinced that Mansfield squandered his money on a multitude of tiny expenditures and that if only she had control of the family finances, every member would be well provided for and they would not have to borrow from others to live. She claimed that when she was running the magazine, she did well enough to pay off one thousand dollars of debts that Mansfield racked up. For his part, Mansfield retorted that the cost of maintaining households in both Charleston and New York while he at times boarded in Washington was the family's principal financial problem.²¹

Austa wished that Mansfield would press the Palmers harder for her name to be restored to the magazine. She regretted ever letting him sell it, despairing over how she could publish any of her output without it, and by 1867 she was urging him to launch a new one. Mansfield agreed with Austa that the quality of the new *Guide* was inferior to the *Beauty*'s, but much unlike her he had no hard feelings toward the Palmers. During his travels in the North in 1867 French encountered the Palmers engaged in revival work twice and came away quite impressed. The couple even honored him before the

¹⁹ See pp. 21-22.

²⁰ "Crucifixion in Dress," *BH* 7, no. 15 (August 1856): 228-29; "Replies, Respecting Dress," *BH* 10, no. 7 (July 1859): 216-19.

²¹ Letters from A. French to M. French, January 3, 1866, February 21, 1866, March 19, 1866, March 26, 1866, October 13, 1866, October 10, 1866, January 10, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 26, 1867, FFP.

congregation at a meeting in Washington. Mansfield thought that the Holiness Movement would do better if the Palmers confined themselves to the evangelism they were good at and allowed the Frenches to do the magazine work that was their forte. Yet he did not believe that he and Austa could be anywhere near capitalized enough to launch their own new publication successfully. He mused that the popular Palmers might be so harried by their evangelistic tours that they would appreciate bringing Austa on board to edit the *Guide*, and he proposed some connection to them directly in November. The couple was “surprised” by Mansfield’s suggestion, and they had no intention of pursuing it.²²

Austa’s resentment against the Palmers over the magazine continued for at least three more years, perhaps until the day she died. In 1869 she still wept “bitterly yet submissively *as ever*” for the loss of *Beauty of Holiness*. She considered its sale to be the reason for the family’s ongoing financial distress and separation. Austa blamed the calamity on the Palmers’ broken promises and, although she denied it, on Mansfield’s unwillingness to do anything about the breach of contract:

They should at once have been made to smart for it. That is the Bible method. No hiding of sin, then & should be now here. Did Dr. P. believe you would act strongly he would at once remedy the matter. That is the way it must be. I could sue him today with all the love I ever felt & be sure it was for the divine glory. Let us act manfully & in the fear of God! Only!

She pled with Mansfield to “put the Palmers through manfully and without fear.” Austa’s vindictiveness aside, it is curious that Mansfield was so brave, zealous, and uncompromising in the defense of Southern blacks and yet displayed none of those

²² A. French to M. French, December 4, 1866, FFP; A. French to M. French, December 11, 1866, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, July 27, 1867, October 29, 1867, November 26, 1867, November 29, 1867, FFP.

qualities to stand up for his wife. A significant part of this, as will be seen in the next section, was that French was uncomfortably aware of how many of his financial interests had been bailed out by Walter Palmer over the years and in some cases were still entwined with the doctor's.²³

As the years progressed, Austa's rancor spread beyond the Palmers to the entire Holiness Movement. As will be touched on in the next section, a new generation emerged during the Civil War to build on the movement's previous gains with enormous success. Austa took unbecoming satisfaction that the Palmers did not participate in a colossal camp meeting at Round Lake, New York in 1869 because, according to gossip, criticism had been spoken against them. "Walter is sour enough to all, I give him no chance to be so to me," she vowed. As far as she knew, no one at the camp meeting missed the power couple, and in fact the "commendations" speakers gave to the *Guide* were so weak that they were practically "condemnations." To Mansfield's perplexity, Austa railed against the movement's leadership as well, convinced that it had gone astray and that the cause of Holiness desperately needed her and Mansfield to reenter the public eye to take the movement back to its pure foundations.²⁴

The last letter that Austa wrote to Mansfield on this subject was dated March 2, 1870, which is also one of the last letters to her husband that survives. It is unknown

²³ Letters from A. French to M. French, date unknown (June 1869?, "It has seemed as real as life . . ."), date unknown (July 1869?, 3F35, "Your [*illegible*] last eve rec[eive]d . . ."), August 13, 1869, FFP.

²⁴ Letters from A. French to M. French, date unknown (July 1869, 3F35, "Flush and I came here on Wednesday . . ."), July 23, 1869, March 2, 1870, FFP; M. French to A. French, date unknown (July-August 1869, "I was not disturbed"), FFP. For the Round Lake camp meeting see Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Evangelicalism 1, Donald W. Dayton and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 109-10.

whether she ever got over the offense before her death ten years later. Phoebe Palmer died in 1874, five years late according to Austa's timetable. Palmer probably never knew what Sister French was thinking.

Debt and Discord, Revolution and Revival

When Mansfield French lost the Senate race in July 1868, he was "more than out of money." He had been unemployed since February and was floating on his friends' support and loans. He needed paying work immediately.²⁵

However, this did not necessarily mean that French's advocacy for freedpeople was coming to an abrupt end. He traveled first to Washington, where he witnessed the swearing-in of South Carolina's new senators. Allies in both Washington and South Carolina still wanted to find a place for French in government, and he was confident that if he returned to the Palmetto State he could get a seat in the state legislature or in Congress. He wrote to Austa, "I am so deeply concerned for the welfare of the colored people that I think but little of myself," but he went north nonetheless. Financial pressures certainly had a role to play, but if he had stayed in South Carolina, it is impossible to believe that Governor Robert K. Scott could not have found him a position on the public dime. French's larger motivations at the moment were probably to reunite with Austa, at least for a while, and to get some much needed rest.²⁶

Fortunately, rest and advocating for Southern blacks were to some extent compatible for the moment. Mansfield and Austa spent some time in Saratoga Springs,

²⁵ M. French to A. French, July 20, 1868, FFP.

²⁶ M. French to A. French, July 22, 1868, FFP.

where Mansfield spoke about the necessity of schools for freedpeople at a Union meeting, and he spoke in New York City as well. Then for a few weeks in September and October French toured Ohio on the payroll of the state's Republican committee stumping on behalf of Ulysses S. Grant for president. French told audiences "that as a minister of the gospel I could not enter the canvass if only political questions were involved—I feel that we were now settling great questions of *humanity*, of *human rights* & herein was my justification." French had a ball; not only did he give what he considered some of the best speeches of his life, but he also saw old friends in stomping grounds that he had not visited in years, like Xenia and Circleville. He was instantly refreshed by being in the country, and he wanted to stay. "It seems like old times to be among this plain, but intelligent & enterprising people," he sighed to Austa. "So much character, & solid sense. Give me the country above the city where there is so much that is artificial. I would be willing to spend the residue of life in Ohio in Columbus or Springfield."²⁷

This was on French's mind when he returned to New York at the beginning of a silent (as to documentary remains) but pivotal period from October 1868 to May 1869 during which he tried to figure out what to do next with his life. Several influences were working on him. One was his fresh acquaintance with America west of the Appalachians. Another was his wish not to be separated from his wife anymore, at least not more than for brief trips. A third must have been burnout. French had run himself ragged on behalf of blacks emerging into freedom for six and a half years, and he ended

²⁷ "Addresses at the Union Meeting," *Daily Saratogian*, August 26, 1868; M. J. French to M. French, September 4, 1868, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, September 25, September 28, October 2, October 10, 1868, FFP.

that period looking back at immense progress but ahead in despair that the goal of a truly free South seemed as far away as ever. For the first time, his hope wavered, and his stamina ran out.

A fourth influence was financial stress. Woefully incomplete surviving evidence makes this impossible to quantify precisely. What is certain, however, is that French sunk as much money as he could (and beyond) into land speculation like his patrilineal ancestors did.²⁸ He even borrowed money for this purpose, or at least he put off repaying his creditors in order to fund his investments. The most striking example is that French borrowed two thousand dollars from Boston philanthropist and Wilberforce University donor Lee Claflin in 1861 and still had not paid him anything in 1868 despite making more than that amount on the sale of *Beauty of Holiness*.²⁹

The properties that French owned for at least some portion of his time in South Carolina included the following:

- *Chesterville, Ohio*. When French was the traveling preacher there in 1849, he bought the old Methodist church building and converted it into a seminary where Austa taught. The man to whom French sold the seminary got deeply into debt to others as well as to French. In 1863 French cancelled the debt, including

²⁸ See pp. 17-19, 22. French also invested in two other sectors. In 1857 he bought stock in a California gold mining outfit called the Sonora Mining Company. (French donated a bound volume of the 1857 issues of *Beauty of Holiness* to the company's library; it now resides in the Archives of Ohio United Methodism at Ohio Wesleyan University.) During the war, French sold some or all of the stock to a bank in exchange for government bonds. See letters from M. French to A. French, April 27, June 8, June 11, 1857, FFP; W. French to M. French, March 22, 1859, FFP; M. French to W. French, February 28, 1860, FFP; A. French to M. French, January 26, 1866, FFP.

²⁹ "Charity Never Faileth," *BH* 10, no. 3 (March 1859): 96; Lee Claflin to M. French, February 1, 1868, FFP.

the note he owned on the building, in exchange for a portion of the proceeds when the congregation, which reacquired the building, sold it.³⁰

- *Columbus, Ohio*. In 1859 French bought a significant amount of land and briefly considered living there instead of moving to New York City. This land, which he rented out to a farmer, was later sold for nonpayment of taxes. Walter Palmer stepped in and redeemed it on French's behalf in exchange for a stake in the property. In 1868 French was offered 2,500 dollars for it. He thought that he could get three thousand out of it at the time but took the proposal as a bellwether of rising property values. He stood pat and hoped to get five thousand dollars or more for it in the future.³¹
- *Cedar Falls and Afton, Iowa*. The first mention of these unimproved lands was in 1863, when French expressed worry that he was about to lose them for nonpayment of taxes.³²
- *Mills County, Iowa*. First mentioned in 1864, this consisted of 160 acres of unimproved upland prairie co-owned with Walter Palmer, who paid the taxes on the land for at least two years. In 1867 it was not worth five dollars per acre, but a railroad under construction nearby was expected to boost its value.³³

³⁰ William Shur to M. French, August 1, 1863, FFP.

³¹ M. French to W. French, September 19, 1859, FFP; Truman Hillyer to M. French, December 5, 1862, FFP; Walter Palmer to M. French, December 7, 1866, FFP; M. French to A. French, January 8, 1868, FFP.

³² M. French to W. French, February 16, 1863, FFP; M. French to W. French, September 3, 1863; M. French to M. J. French, June 12, 1869, FFP.

³³ M. French to A. French, March 16, 1864, FFP; Walter Palmer to M. French, December 7, 1866, FFP; William H. Taft to M. French, August 29, 1867, FFP.

- *Beaufort, South Carolina.* (a) The Tabby Manse town home has already been discussed; it belonged to the American Missionary Association in 1868. (b) In the same town was the Barnwell house, in which French had a stake and whose ultimate disposition is unknown.³⁴
- *Johns Island, South Carolina.* Also discussed earlier, this was the three hundred-acre plantation that the American Missionary Association traded to French for the Tabby Manse even though its title was vested in Salmon P. Chase.³⁵
- Other lands in *South Carolina* are mentioned in the documentary remains. (a) In 1870 French owned 320 acres near Beaufort that by that time were confiscated for nonpayment of taxes. This property was probably bought while French was still living in South Carolina. (b) In 1866 Austa referred to Mansfield's "‘swamp place’ & the other lands there." These are otherwise unknown, but it is possible that they were the same as (c) lands in *Florida* that French appears to have owned jointly with Salmon P. Chase. These properties are mentioned only in June 1869, when French was worried that they also might be confiscated for nonpayment of taxes.³⁶
- *New York City.* (a) When the Frenches first moved to New York, they lived in a house that they may have owned themselves, but by 1863 they "lost" it.³⁷ (b)

With the money the Frenches made from the sale of the magazine as a down

³⁴ See pp. 398, 475-76.

³⁵ See p. 475.

³⁶ M. French to A. French, March 17, 1870, FFP; M. French to A. French, May 27, 1870, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 3, 1869, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, June 12, 1869, FFP.

³⁷ M. J. French to M. French, May 9, 1860, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 2, 1863, FFP.

payment, Mansfield allowed Austa to purchase a brownstone house at 424 East 51st Street in 1864. While Mansfield was away, Austa rented the house out to others, intending to use the rental income to provide her some ready cash as she boarded elsewhere. The plan met with uneven success; their renter in 1865-66 was not the best tenant. To make matters worse, there was confusion between the Frenches, the seller, and the bank during this same period, which happened to be the very season that Austa's name was struck from the cover of the *Guide*. The Frenches once valued the house at fifteen thousand dollars, but in 1868 Mansfield priced it lower. The house was without a renter through much of that year, and in the fall, just before Mansfield's Ohio tour, he and Austa moved in and finally lived there themselves.³⁸

As this catalog indicates, Mansfield had an incorrigible tendency to get himself in over his head, buying lands that he could not fully pay for, whose taxes he could not keep up with, which failed to appreciate as quickly as he hoped, and which he had difficulty selling his way out of. Austa was not impressed with Mansfield's investment decisions; in 1866 she pointedly asked him, "Do you not see that the Lord does not prosper you in these things nor has since we left Circleville?" This suggests that Mansfield had been trading land more or less continuously since he was co-proprietor of the school in Marietta. Austa did not mean that investing in real estate was a bad idea, however—she

³⁸ Mansfield Joseph French, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1940), 101; M. French to A. French, September 9, 1864, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, January 13, January 16, January 26, February 5, February 9, March 2, March 16, 1866, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, April 2, April 15, June 7, June 9, June 12, June 16, 1868, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, July 11, 1868, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, Sept. 4, 1868, FFP.

meant that she could do it better. Her purchase of 424 East 51st Street in 1864 was her first taste of the action. She followed it up in 1867 by buying multiple lots in *Vineland, New Jersey*, the site of the first “National Camp Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness” earlier that summer, which Austa probably attended with ten thousand others. She also bought an empty lot in her beloved *Saratoga Springs, New York*, which was entering a construction boom.³⁹

Thus, in addition to the overall need to sustain himself and Austa by gainful employment, Mansfield also felt the pressure to maintain his many landholdings that he was in acute danger of losing to confiscation or foreclosure and also to pay back the unknown number of friends who had lent him small (or large) sums over the years. Combined with his sheer exhaustion and desire for a fresh and sustainable start, in 1868-69 French’s priorities made an astounding shift. After thinking of hardly anything but freedom and justice for American blacks since 1862 or before, he put the cause out of his mind completely. The contrast in the documentary remains before and after January 1, 1869 could not be more stark. On rare occasions he proudly recalled past victories, but he gave no more thought to the present or the future of the South, which as a Senate candidate he had lamented was “farther off from reconstruction today than ever,” an analysis corroborated by events through the rest of his life and beyond. This dramatic shift of focus mirrored that of other Protestant preachers throughout the North once Reconstruction state governments were established in the South and Grant took office as

³⁹ A. French to M. French, March 19, 1866, FFP; see pp. 55-56 above; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 103-6; M. French to A. French, August 19, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 16, 1868, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, July 11, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 19, 1869, FFP.

president.⁴⁰

Mansfield French was like a man waking from a vivid dream who had to shake it off despite its power and get going with real life again. But what was his real life now? He left the North as a magazine publisher, but the magazine was gone. He had been a leading Methodist figure in the Holiness Movement, but the movement moved on without him. The tide of Holiness teaching continued rising after the Civil War because a new generation of urban pastors and Methodist presiding elders led by John Swannell Inskip emerged while French was in the South. These men organized ecumenical “national camp meetings” that drew tens of thousands of people to Vineland in 1867, Manheim, Pennsylvania in 1868, and Round Lake, New York in 1869. Inskip and others even took the camp meeting on the road on a tour of the Far West. In order to prevent anything that would discredit the movement, the National Camp Meeting Association managed their events so as to cultivate solemn silence and curtail outbreaks of any “enthusiasm” even more strictly than Charles Grandison Finney and the Palmers had done in the 1850s. As always, however, the new organizers used periodicals, books, and pamphlets to spread their message with great effectiveness. The Methodist Episcopal Church joyously endorsed the revivalistic movement and celebrated its fruit. The denomination elected eight new bishops in 1872, and “six of them were friendly with the holiness cause.”⁴¹

One can imagine an alternate history in which French declined Rufus Saxton’s

⁴⁰ M. French to A. French, April 17, 1868, FFP; M. French to Samuel Hunt, January 5, 1876, FFP; sermon on 2 Chronicles 15:15, FFP; sermon on Galatians 6:7, FFP; Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863–1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142.

⁴¹ Gerald O. McCulloh and Timothy L. Smith, “The Theology and Practices of Methodism, 1876–1919,” in Emory Stevens Bucke, gen. ed., *The History of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 2:612–15; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 96–127; see pp. 128–29 above.

invitation to join his staff in 1862 and instead returned home to keep his magazine going. In that series of events, French might have been one of the pro-Holiness Methodist bishops elected in 1872. But his decision to stay in the South proved to be a watershed. His choice attached him to more friends in high places in the Republican Party but attenuated his relationships with the movers and shakers in the institutions of Northern Methodism. By the time he came North for good, leadership opportunities in the Holiness Movement had been seized by others in his absence, and there was no obvious place for him.

Austa French was not giving up, however. Her indignation toward the movement, though aggravated by her resentment toward the Palmers, also reflected real concern by old-timers that the new “leaders are bound that nothing that anyone can object to shall appertain to [holiness’s] teachings or enjoyments.” Methodists like Austa remembered the transitional period of the 1840s and ’50s, when emotional revivals and an educated clergy were not contradictory; in fact, at the very time that Methodists founded colleges at a breakneck pace, annual revivals at those schools justified their existence. Bridling under the tight control of meetings and increasing formality, ever the Frenches’ bugbear, Austa was convinced that she and Mansfield must reenter the fray and steer the movement back to the old path. The market was strong for Holiness-oriented reading material and for the new mode of itinerancy from one burgeoning city and camp meeting to the next; the Palmers and Inskip proved both. It was time for the Frenches to be the next Holiness

power couple, Mansfield with his mouth and Austa with her pen.⁴²

In the Frenches' financial condition, however, this was a tall order. They needed a source of income that would enable them not only to keep up with their current obligations but also to fund a new magazine and revivalistic travels. Austa was convinced that her investment in their New York row house was a boon to their finances despite that her administration as landlady had hardly been smooth and that the house's value and rents in the local market were both sinking. Austa pressed Mansfield to buy a second house, rent it out, and use the income to fund their living expenses, travels, and magazine while keeping up with the mortgage interest and taxes. Mansfield, who preferred agricultural plots to urban lots, was skeptical. He had no steady income, and they were already pressed hard enough. Yet it is likely that he carried a feeling of guilt over what his decision to sell the magazine in 1864 against his wife's wishes had done to her, and he was loath to snuff out her dream again. Mansfield "had to pray much to be willing" to extend himself into this new obligation, but he reluctantly agreed. The Frenches bought number 303 on the same street, East 51st. Austa was convinced that they acted at the explicit direction of God and that both houses were his gifts to them; she fatefully concluded that it would be a sin to give them up.⁴³

In the years that followed, the Frenches' strategy proved to be a disaster. The falling property values and rents in New York and the failure of their speculations to appreciate at the pace that they anticipated came not from a temporary downturn or a bad

⁴² See pp. 132-33, 159; A. French to M. French, March 2, 1870, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 24, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 24, 1870, FFP; cf. Walter W. Benjamin, "The Methodist Church in the Postwar Era," in Bucke, *History of American Methodism*, 2:323.

⁴³ M. French to A. French, January 21, 1870, FFP.

year. In 1865, Treasury Secretary Hugh McCulloch instituted a policy of taking government-issued greenbacks out of circulation to prepare for the Treasury Department to pay back bonds with metal currency. This monetary approach would not be relaxed by Grant, who was elected in 1868 with the backing of powerful Eastern financiers with a vested interest in hard currency. While the supply of money contracted, the population continued to grow. Cash became increasingly hard to come by, and the value of the dollar rose. Fledgling entrepreneurs (aside from railroad barons fed at the public trough) struggled to get startup capital; speculators could not find buyers in order to realize a return on their investments; landlords competed with each other for diminishing rents; debtors were crushed. In short, the Frenches, already overextended with little reliable income, enacted their plan to gain financial independence and launch their new ministry at the worst economic moment.⁴⁴

In 1869 the Frenches found a renter for 303 and struggled to find one for 424. Mansfield had to find work, and he found it in an unexpected source. In 1866-68 a conservative government in Spain exercised more severe control over its colonies, including Cuba, so Cuban-born elites from the eastern part of the island began making plans for an anticolonial revolution. In September 1868 a liberal revolution in Spain that drove Queen Isabella II into exile provided the opening that Cuban revolutionaries were looking for. On October 10, while French was campaigning for Grant in Ohio, sugar planter Carlos Manuel de Céspedes gathered his black slaves, announced their freedom, and summoned them to fight with him for Cuba's independence, the first act of what

⁴⁴ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2011), NOOK e-book, 316.

came to be called the Ten Years' War. The population of eastern Cuba had a high proportion of whites and also free people of color compared to the western part of the island, making emancipation a risk worth taking as well as a principled stand for the liberal-minded revolutionaries there. As in the American Civil War, the abolition of slavery came in halting stages borne of practical necessity, racial equality was not immediately assumed, and control over freedpeople was deemed critical by white leaders. Also like the United States' experience, war had a way of taking the principles of liberation and equality far beyond what was initially expected. Unlike the United States, by the end of the nineteenth century the Cuban independence movement evolved into a full-scale antiracial campaign as well as an anticolonial one—Cuban revolutionaries eventually declared that race itself did not exist.⁴⁵

Long before the revolution fulfilled its promise—in fact, before it began at all—French became acquainted with an expatriate named Manuel de Quesada who was in New York in 1868 seeking support for the nascent Cuban uprising. In certain ways it was the ideal cause for French. As the abolitionist crusade in the United States crossed thresholds that amounted to a ragged, ambiguous, and not wholly satisfactory conclusion, many abolitionists turned away from the troubles of American blacks to other social causes that demanded immediate action. Cuba's struggle for independence had qualities that fit French perfectly. It combined the ideals of liberty from colonial tyranny, multiracial fraternity, and incipient equality of former masters and slaves, and it helped that the enemy was a traditional arch-Catholic power. Its international aspect must have

⁴⁵ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1-28.

delighted him as well—after all, his passion was *Universal Freedom*—and it brought back the unfulfilled calling of his youth to preach to revolutionaries in Greece and his ardent interest in Hungary’s Lajos Kossuth in the 1850s. Finally, French saw the United States to be in the same position in God’s providence vis-à-vis oppressed Cuba and wicked Spain as he saw the North in the contest between slaves and Confederates during the Civil War. “Is not Cuba struggling today to throw off the chains from all her bondmen?” he wrote:

And if God required the bondman’s chains in our land, to be broken off by the same hands that helped to forge and bind them, will he not, does he not, now demand of us that we stretch out the same guilty hands to aid the Cuban Patriots in breaking off the chains which in the days of our guilt, we wickedly helped to bind her bondmen with?⁴⁶

French became an advocate for Cuba’s revolutionaries in New York and Washington. Senators Samuel C. Pomeroy and Nathaniel P. Banks were particularly interested in the cause. In May 1869 French headed to Chicago carrying their recommendation (and a free rail pass that Pomeroy wrangled from infamous robber baron James Fisk) to drum up support. French probably also sold bonds issued by the provisional revolutionary government on commission as he did later.⁴⁷

However, French did not stay in Chicago for long, if in fact he went there at all. By the end of May he was in East St. Louis, Illinois, where a wealthy, elderly, unmarried Methodist woman from New York by the name of St. John had large landholdings. St.

⁴⁶ Letters from M. French to A. French, October 2, October 10, 1868, June 18, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, October 10, 1868, FFP; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed., Eric Foner, consulting ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 204-5; see pp. 33, 171-80 above; M. French to Ulysses S. Grant, April 4, 1870, FFP.

⁴⁷ Samuel C. Banks and Nathaniel P. Banks’ letter of recommendation, May 16, 1869, FFP; Samuel C. Pomeroy to James Fisk, May 16, 1869, FFP.

John hired French to help her to administer her wealth productively for Methodist causes. French expected that his “services” to St. John would yield a big payday that would enable him to pay off the loan on 424 East 51st, which ominously still went unrented, Austa being unable to agree with a tenant on a price.⁴⁸

French was awed by St. Louis and southern Illinois. It was “a wonderfully fertile region, far surpassing any one I ever saw.” Five railroads intersected in the city; French saw a train headed east with forty-six cars. “Two hundred car loads of coal” came in every day, which was “found only 6 miles out, in an inexhaustible quantity.” Traffic on the river was equally impressive:

A long line of steamers line the Missouri shore, and all sorts of crafts are passing up & down the river. But the sublimest scene is the foundry where rails, are made for the roads. The roar is much like that of Niagara. Steam shovels are going in all directions raising sand onto cars, which move off to the old channel bed of the river a thousand years ago, & dump their heavy loads till now in some places you find the bed filled up. Steam power, cash & Yankee brains can do almost anything.

The original French population of East St. Louis had given way to a large influx of Irish and German Catholics. Protestants were only beginning to arrive. French was appalled at the many “Beer shops” open on the Sabbath while throngs were “promenading and dancing while a Band is playing.” Like Ohio forty years earlier, this was a swelling mission field ripe for harvest, critical to be seized both for the kingdom of God and for the nation’s good. Methodist McKendree College in Lebanon, Illinois was prepared to offer French a permanent job as its agent to build its endowment if he convinced St. John to make a massive donation of land or money to the school. French wanted to move to the

⁴⁸ Letters from M. French to A. French, date unknown (“which commences at the terminus . . .”), June 2, 3, 18, 21, 1869, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, June 12, 1869, FFP.

area permanently, use it as his home base for fundraising and itinerant preaching, and start a Holiness magazine for Austa in the booming West out of the shadow of the *Guide*. Austa, however, resisted. She hated change and felt that she had been through enough of it. Somehow she came to conceive of the cause of Holiness indistinguishably from her web of relationships in New York Methodism such that to leave one was to leave the other. She would do neither no matter how much Mansfield pled; she was certain that it was “not the will of God.” Additionally, the frailty of Austa’s health returned. In July she went to Saratoga to be healed by its waters, and she did not leave the town—and for long stretches did not go outdoors—for a full year.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, the Frenches’ financial situation deteriorated badly. Mortgage holders on the two New York houses demanded interest payments, and the Frenches had nothing to give them. The foreclosure of number 303 was imminent. Number 424 was not rented out until November; son Mansfield Joshua, who was looking after the property on his parents’ behalf, declined to rent to the only person interested in it at their price, a Jew. Mansfield and Austa continued to quarrel over money. This mostly consisted of Austa’s interminable insistences that Mansfield frittered his money away needlessly while she went without and that if the family’s money was in her hands then everything would be fine. Mansfield retorted that if Austa gave up “reading the *Herald* in bed” then the money she would save from the subscription would allow her to buy the three calico dresses that she pined for so badly. Mansfield vented his doubts that the houses even if rented could

⁴⁹ Letters from M. French to A. French, May 30, June 29, July 3, 19, 23, 29, 31, date unknown (“I was not disturbed . . .”), September 24, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, July 23, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, August 13, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 3, 1869, FFP. For another example of French’s anti-Catholic nativism, see M. French to A. French, September 10, 1875, FFP.

ever support him and Austa as she imagined. He begged Austa to sell her lot in Saratoga so that they could stay ahead of or pay off one of the mortgages on one of the houses, but she refused, making the excuse that her friends in the village all agreed that it was worth more than anyone was willing to pay. Irritated, Mansfield replied that what the lot was worth *was* what someone was willing to pay.⁵⁰

Mansfield bewailed the fact that they were five thousand dollars further in debt than they were the year before. At the same time, however, he was finding himself again as a revival preacher like he had not been for years. Although at first he lacked his old power, by September he was preaching with “great liberty” at a camp meeting, the Southern Illinois Annual Conference, and elsewhere; the conference invited him because it wanted the “fire” that the fifty-nine-year-old could still bring. Mansfield felt that he could move hearts in the West like he could not do in the East, and if he could only get out from under his debts he would do it full time. He wanted to sell the houses, even at a loss, in order to restart his ministry in Illinois or Missouri, and he directed Mansfield Joshua to look for a buyer for number 303. Austa protested, considering such a move to be forsaking the Lord. “God will not help if we do not do all our part,” she wrote. “If we do I have no fear or doubt. . . . Fight the good fight of keeping, believing in faith. But if we fail we cannot claim his help.” Selling 303 was out of the question. “It would break the engagement of God with me, it seems to me.” All of her friends told her that its value

⁵⁰ Letters from M. French to A. French, May 30, June 2, 21, July 2, 31, date unknown (“I was not disturbed . . .”), August 29, 1869, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, June 12, 1869, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, July 7, 1869, FFP; M. J. French to A. French, July 7, 1869 (Choice Letters, 99), FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, date unknown (1869, “It has seemed as real as life . . .”), August 13, date unknown (3F35, first line damaged), October 15, November 11, 16, 1869, FFP.

would rise to the outlandish figure of ninety thousand dollars in three years.⁵¹

Throughout this long summer and autumn of debate, Miss St. John played a manipulative game with Mansfield. He and St. John's nephew offered her a sum for a large amount of land as a speculation—where French expected to get the money is anyone's guess—but St. John dismissed it. Then French worked on a deal by which St. John would donate a large and valuable tract of land to McKendree College, which in addition to blessing the institution immensely would also win French a desperately needed bonus and then a job from the college. For a while St. John played along, but at the last moment she backed away. As French tried to recover from the disappointment, St. John dangled the possibility that she might be interested in subsidizing the launch of a new magazine and hinted that she might be about to make "a generous proposition" to McKendree after all. One month later, St. John filed ten lawsuits that would embroil her assets for an age and prevent her from giving or selling anything. French was angry at the waste of three months and seriously considered quitting her employment with the knowledge that the college was now too poor to hire him and that his deliverance was not to come through her benevolence after all. When he was finally poised to depart in September 1869 St. John suddenly sent him on an urgent errand to research something at the state capitol in Springfield. Immediately afterward French quit again. As he was standing on the platform waiting for a train to Chicago, St. John sent for him, promising to give to the college and pay him for another week's work. French made up his mind to

⁵¹ Letters from M. French to A. French, September 13, 16, 18, 20, 24, 1869, FFP; H. French to M. French, October 1, 1869, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, October 19, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, date unknown (1869, "I mailed to Book Concern"), FFP; A. French to M. French, October 19, 1869, FFP.

work for McKendree for a year over Austa's objections if St. John came through, but she reneged once more. On October 7 French quit a third time and once again was summoned back. A week later French finally left for good, disgusted at St. John's miserliness. In hindsight it is obvious what was happening. The unmarried lady was quite fond of having a male companion who desperately needed her money. St. John had no intention of giving her fortune but every intention of hanging on to French for as long as she could. If he ever grasped the nature of the game, he did not let on.⁵²

French traveled from St. Louis to check on his Cedar Falls, Iowa property in hopes that he might liquidate it to pay his unhappy New York creditors. To his dismay, he discovered at the nearby town of Waterloo that the cost to redeem the land, which had been sold for taxes, was too great for him realize any good from it, especially since the year had been so terrible for local farmers that no one had any money to buy it off him. French tried to get money out of his other properties. Since Austa would not sell her Saratoga lot, French asked her at least to mortgage it, intending to use the loan to pacify their New York mortgage holders. A Saratoga banker was willing but unable—there was no money to be found. Mansfield seems to have managed to get a mortgage from a New York banker on the Saratoga property that caught him up on 303, but 424 was still in arrears. He began selling his personal belongings and some furnishings out of 424, where he boarded with the renter whom he had finally acquired. French also directed his son Winchell, who was living in Beaufort and renting the Tabby Manse from the American Missionary Association, to see about what money might be wrung out of his properties in

⁵² Letters from M. French to A. French, June 29, July 2, 3, 6, 19, 23, 29, 31, August 23, September 22, 27, 1869, FFP; H. French to M. French, October 1, 1869, FFP.

South Carolina, including the possibility of reversing the 1867 swap that put the Johns Island cotton plantation in French's hands in exchange for the house. Austa opposed this proposal as well, convinced that the value of the Sea Island property would explode in five to ten years and that they should hold tight and trust God to provide.⁵³

When Mansfield arrived back in New York in November 1869, he felt more of the inner tension between stress-induced despair and spiritual power that he experienced in Illinois. His son-in-law George Lansing Taylor, who was now stationed at the prominent Allen Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York in the midst of a warm revival, invited French to assist him in a week of meetings. French hardly had the heart for it, but he assented. Once he got into the work, he thought that he performed fairly well, but he could not shake the weakness and sadness in his soul under the weight of his huge debts. He felt the burden holding him back from moving people the way he used to. Austa was deeply sympathetic and encouraging and expressed her longing to see him. She was praying for a breakthrough in his ministry fervently. At the same time, she suggested that Mansfield's problems were first his lack of faith and second that he had no experience doing work that he did not love, as she often had to do for him. She took the fact that the creditors were still kept at bay—despite that the Frenches had to go deeper into debt to do it—as evidence that God was still providing for them. “I want to know to all eternity that I trusted Him *in the very midst* of the trial, & not merely when sight came to my aid,” she proclaimed. “He won't let us fail *provided we follow Him*. . . . But if we take the work out

⁵³ Letters from M. French to A. French, October 19, 22, 30, 1869, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, October 19, 1869, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, November 13, 16, 23, December 1, 1869, January 15, 1870, FFP.

of His hands by selling the House, He directed me to buy, He may drop us, as to that business.” As Mansfield sank in darkness, Austa burned on a spiritual high.⁵⁴

The revival in Taylor’s church was still thriving when French received an invitation from a pastor in Rondout, New York (part of present-day Kingston) to help him there for a week for twenty-five dollars. French accepted, not knowing that in the midst of his discouragement he was to conduct what was most likely the greatest revival of his life in terms of the number of lives changed. From the beginning, both seekers of salvation and seekers of sanctification came forward and testified to experiencing God’s grace. In Saratoga, Austa prayed vigorously for Mansfield’s ministry, although to his dismay her fears of getting sick again prevented her from joining him on site. After two weeks the church paid Mansfield all that they intended to give him, but he chose to stay with them and keep laboring anyway. Despite taking a break during the holidays to see Austa, when he returned in January 1870 the revival erupted again immediately. The awakening was going as strong as ever in the middle of the month when French gave it up out of sheer exhaustion. In his roughly five weeks in Rondout, three to four hundred people experienced conversion and 275 joined the church.⁵⁵

French’s return to New York was a return to financial tortures that had not disappeared. Rent prices were plummeting, and he had trouble securing rental agreements for the next year. The renter in 424 feared that her boarders were leaving. Mansfield

⁵⁴ Letters from M. French to A. French, November 8, 23, 29, December 6, 10, 1869, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, November 4, date unknown (“How long till Jardine’s . . .”), November 23, 26, December 1, date unknown (“Have been nearly . . .”), 1869, FFP.

⁵⁵ Letters from M. French to A. French, December 3, 6, 10, 13, 16, 20, 22, 1869, January 6, 1870, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, December 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 1869, FFP; M. French to H. French, December 21, 1869, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, January 11, 1870, FFP; “Revival Intelligence,” *New York Evangelist*, January 27, 1870.

finally served notice to Austa that number 303 must be sold. He had an interested buyer that promised a 1,500-dollar loss, but he had to take it; it was time for her to “pray for grace to let go the idol.” He also told her the cautionary tale of acquaintances who attempted to start their own magazine not long before and had lost everything. He would not allow himself and Austa to imitate their fate. Austa still resisted; to sell 303 was to “forsake God,” who would assuredly enable them to start a magazine. In February Mansfield had an offer for a house trade with a Methodist brother that would lighten his debt load considerably. Austa dug in with more stubbornness than ever, relentlessly demanding that he not think of selling the house in letter after letter. The couple also argued about how Austa was spending her time in Saratoga. As Mansfield saw it, she ceaselessly debilitated her body with toil over works that were never published and served no purpose. Austa thought that when her books were finally released they would earn money that would deliver them from their troubles, especially if they had a magazine to promote them. Mansfield thought that this was nonsense and urged her to write short articles for other people’s magazines, which would earn a little money and do their readers good. He considered Austa to be as miserly with her pen as Miss St. John was with her wealth. It is impossible to conclude with any justice that Austa did not care about the real spiritual needs of potential readers, especially as pertained to sanctification. Nonetheless, there is evidence that Austa was ultimately more concerned about her literary output being exactly what she wanted, presented the way she wanted it, than she

was about the objective that her writing was supposed to accomplish.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, more light did break through the gloom that winter. In February French preached for about two weeks in a revival in Bergen, New Jersey (part of present-day Jersey City) whose meetings were even more powerful than those in Rondout. French also arrived at a settlement with the American Missionary Association. The previous December, Winchell French sold a house co-owned by Mansfield French and the AMA—whether the Barnwell house or some other property is not known—and sent Mansfield’s half north to pay mortgage interest. The situation with the Johns Island plantation, however, was difficult to resolve. If the theory sketched in the previous chapter is correct,⁵⁷ the AMA had still not acquired the deed from Chase by 1870. Meanwhile, the association, having decided not to pursue starting a school in Beaufort, was looking to liquidate its assets there, including the Tabby Manse. This put French at risk of losing both properties, as he had an agreement with the AMA but not with Chase, who had no legal obligation to cede the Johns Island land to French and had no interest in doing so despite French’s loss. Indeed, since French did not have title to the land, it is possible that the rental and crop payments of 1868-69 had gone to Chase and not to him—French complained that he had had “no benefit” from the land since the swap. French urged the AMA not to sell the house but instead to trade it back to him; he reasoned that the house would be worth more to him, as he intended to keep it, while the association could

⁵⁶ Letters from M. French to A. French, December 16, 1869, January 21, date unknown (“Thursday 5. PM.”), January 27, 28, date unknown (“I came over this beautiful morn . . .”), February 21, March 17, 19, April 1, 1870, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French, date unknown (“Again I must write . . .”), January 24, February 21, 25, March 2, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to A. French, March 30, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 24, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 28, 1870, FFP.

⁵⁷ See p. 475.

bargain with Chase from a much stronger position than he could for its claim to the plantation. The AMA stalled, and some around French encouraged him to sue, but in March 1870 the association agreed to trade French's house back. French had a 4,500-dollar offer for it right away and could have sold it to pay on his New York debts, but he declined to do so, expecting it to appreciate quickly. In the meantime, Winchell paid him rent to live in it. French's Beaufort prospects also brightened with the plan to extend the Port Royal Railroad close to his 320-acre plantation, which he hoped would greatly increase its value—if he could redeem it after it too was confiscated for failure to pay property tax.⁵⁸

Another ray of light came from Cuba. Manuel de Quesada returned to New York, and he commissioned French to go to Washington as his forerunner. Quesada was looking for diplomatic recognition of an independent Cuba and aid in money and weapons. French was honored and delighted, and he traveled to the capital to work on lobbying and publicity for most of March, April, and May. Cuban independence fired his spirit again. Whatever Austa might say about Mansfield's faith in the face of debt, he was "not daunted in *the least*" about the victory of Cuba's multiracial patriots. "I feel so *clearly & strongly* that the cause is of God," he wrote Austa, "that my faith lays hold of *Him*. I feel as strong as a *giant* in the face of all this apathy & opposition. . . . *Divine Providence* will

⁵⁸ A. French to M. French, February 11, 1870, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, December 10, 12, 20, 1869, January 21, date unknown ("I came over this beautiful morn . . ."), February 28, 1870, FFP; Bruling and B. F. Britten to M. French, February 20, March 15, 16, 17, 19, May 27, 1870, FFP; Mansfield French to E. P. Smith, September 23, 1869, AMA 74135; M. French to E. P. Smith, October 9, 1869, AMA 74136; Mansfield French to George Whipple, December 20, 1869, AMA 93898; Mansfield French to George Whipple, December 24, 1869, AMA 93915; Mansfield French to George Whipple, December 28, 1869, AMA 93926; M. French to George Whipple, January 3, 1870, AMA 93988; Mansfield French to George Whipple, January 6, 1870, AMA 93997; Mansfield French to George Whipple, February 22, 1870, AMA 94142; M. J. French to M. French, March 28, 1870, FFP.

carry the cause to a successful *issue*.” French introduced Quesada, spoke at soirées in senators’ homes, wrote about Cuba in magazines with national readership, and sold Cuban bonds to garner income that he needed as desperately as the revolution did. French even spoke directly with President Grant on the subject.⁵⁹

Many who advocated that the United States get directly involved in the Cuban war saw an opportunity to secure a friendly barrier island to protect the Gulf Coast from foreign attack. Even the Cubans encouraged this line of thinking, but French scorned the argument as “too low ground.” In his view, the reason to intervene in Cuba was the same as during the Civil War: to get the nation on the side of providence and escape the wrath of God. French told Grant that everything that the nation had done out of expedience during the Civil War availed nothing. However, once the country announced its commitment to Universal Freedom and racial equality,

Providence favor[ed] us with a Joshua, able to lead our oft baffled forces through the “wilderness”, and across the Jordan [i.e., Grant]; and a Gideon to head the grand army of torch bearers, as they kindled the fires of freedom, through all the dark land of oppression [i.e., Sherman]. When the death-blow of slavery had been struck, the gates of Richmond opened of their own accord.

French was probably considering that after almost eight months of fruitless investment of Petersburg and Richmond in 1864-65, the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery was passed by Congress, and the Confederates abandoned their capital two months later.

Although it is safe to say that Grant’s memory of why and how the siege ended was quite

⁵⁹ Letters from M. French to A. French, March 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 19, 22, 29, April 18, May 23, 27, 30, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 24, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, March 28, 1870, FFP; M. French to H. French, May 28, 1870, FFP. French was given some bonds to sell and others as his own for compensation. He attempted to balance selling his own bonds in order to get badly needed cash with holding on to them for the prospect of substantial riches once Cuba’s independence was secure. Thirty thousand dollars’ worth of Cuban bonds were still in his estate when he died. When the revolution ended (temporarily) in 1878, they became worthless. See French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 103.

different from French's, the latter's point was that if God had chastisement in store for America, a friendly Cuba would do nothing to prevent it. The reason to take the posture of the Good Samaritan toward Cuba was to confirm the nation's repentance for the sin of slavery, which the revolutionaries were trying to overthrow in Cuba and in which the United States had formerly been complicit. French asked,

Mr. President, if we would accomplish a great mission in the Gulf, must we not first undo the wrongs we have done there? If we fail to do this, can we reasonably expect success in other respects? Rather is there not danger that what we seek as a defense may by God's overruling turn out to be our greatest weakness? While on the other hand, if we enter the Gulf to plant the *cross of freedom* on every isle with all the blessings of a true christian civilisation, may we not expect that God will guard the goodly heritage against all its foes?⁶⁰

French concluded his mission for Cuba believing the cause to be “booming up *grandly*” and sure that the momentum that he helped to generate would push the United States into supporting the island's independence. He was mistaken. Moreover, while he worked for Cuba he continued to fight the same financial and domestic battles in his personal life. He struggled to find renters for his houses, finally nailing down arrangements in July 1870. He despairingly projected a loss of three thousand dollars over the course of the year and saw that between the mortgage on number 424 and the two on 303 (one past due), he needed to come up with 7,425 dollars by November 1. He wanted to sell everything at any cost, move west, and preach. Austa wanted her magazine in New York. Mansfield would not force her to do anything without her consent, including selling 303 (her name was on the deed). He begged her at least to sell her lot in

⁶⁰ M. French to A. French, March 4, 1870, FFP; M. French to Ulysses S. Grant, April 4, 1870, FFP.

Saratoga. She still refused.⁶¹

More light broke in 1870, however, and it pointed the way to a more stable life. In September Mansfield traveled to Saratoga Springs and took the cloistered Austa on a trip to his birthplace of Manchester, Vermont, which she had never seen and which he had not visited in thirty-six years. Going out of doors did Austa a world of good, and her health improved dramatically. At this point the documentary remains become thinner and the gaps much wider, so we cannot know about French's activities definitively. We do know, however, that at the end of the year French was hired to serve briefly as interim pastor at Orient, New York, on the eastern tip of Long Island's North Fork. He turned in a powerful eight-week performance that generated many professions of conversion and sanctification. French performed the same interim/revivalist function at an unknown number of Methodist churches in 1871, including Rutherford Park, New Jersey (today known as Rutherford), where he raised money to plant a new church, and Glens Falls, New York, where he ended the year. In 1872 (and perhaps earlier) he played the same role at Newtown, New York (today the Elmhurst neighborhood of Queens). The church loved him so much that it successfully begged the New York East Conference to place him there as its regular pastor. French was not satisfied that his ministry in Newtown was very fruitful, but he counted one hundred converted and forty sanctified at revivals at which he assisted in other nearby churches during that pastorate. In 1873 he was placed at Pearsalls (today Lynbrook), also on Long Island, where he enjoyed a fine ministry and

⁶¹ Letters from M. French to A. French, March 17, 19, 24, April 1, 18, 22, 24, date unknown ("I came over here the evening . . ."), May 30, July 18, 1870, FFP; M. J. French to A. French, March 30, 1870, FFP; H. French to M. French, April 8, 1870, FFP; A. French to M. French, June 24, 1870, FFP.

continued to partner with colleagues in revivals with great effectiveness. In 1875 some of his fellows suggested that the Annual Conference in 1876 ought to appoint him Conference Evangelist, and French was open to the idea. In the meantime, he returned to writing magazine articles and also a couple of tracts that told folksy, didactic stories from his ministry in rural Ohio.⁶²

Yet despite the steady income, occupational stability did not translate into financial stability. In 1871 French acquired a house in Rutherford Park—probably by somehow prying Austa’s iron grip off of 303 East 51st Street and trading it, as references to 303 in correspondence end at about this time. Nevertheless, he continued to struggle under his debts, partly because he could not stop acquiring real estate. The Frenches fell behind on the tax on their Saratoga lot and tried to borrow money to pay it—Austa forever remained unwilling to sell, no matter how severe the risk of foreclosure on their other properties. Mention of an otherwise unknown property on Shelter Island (off eastern Long Island) appears in Mansfield’s Newtown period as another obligation he could not meet. By 1874 Mansfield somehow acquired a house in Brooklyn whose mortgage he struggled to keep up with. By 1875 if not before he co-owned it with his son Hamline, from whom he borrowed money at least once. 424 East 51st still hung over his

⁶² M. French to H. French, August 24, 1870, FFP; M. French to H. French, September 7, 1870, FFP; W. T. Terry to M. French, December 30, 1870, FFP; J. B. Merwin to W. T. Terry, January 3, 1871, FFP; M. French to George Lansing Taylor, February 23, 1871, FFP; M. French, “Revival in Orient, L. I.” *Christian Advocate*, April 6, 1871; W. T. Terry to M. French, May 22, 1871, FFP; “Methodism at Rutherford Park,” *Christian Advocate*, October 5, 1871; M. French to H. French, December 11, 1871, FFP; M. French to H. French, December 20, 1871, FFP; Thomas Burford and G. S. Gates to H. F. Pease, April 8, 1872, FFP; Stephen Merritt, Jr. to M. French, date unknown, FFP; Mansfield French, diary, 1873, FFP; M. French to H. French, January 6, 1875, FFP; M. French to H. French, February 17, 1875, FFP; M. French to A. French, date unknown (1875, “Enclosed is notice . . .”), FFP; M. French to M. J. French, April 12, 1875, FFP; M. French to H. French, April 15, 1875, FFP; Mansfield French, “Who Burned Brother John’s Woodpile?” *Christian Advocate*, August 26, 1875; “Selections from Our Catalogue,” *Christian Advocate*, January 20, 1876; Mansfield French, *The Lord and the Distillers. Who Got the Corn?* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, n.d.); Mansfield French, *Why Brother John Lost His Horse* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, n.d.), FFP.

head as well; his difficulty finding a renter for it in 1875 threatened to “ruin” him. Later that year French managed to trade it for a house in Tenaflly, New Jersey which he in turn sold to his son Mansfield Joshua. That transaction finally sprung the Frenches from debt (or at least what they could not keep up with). It also signified the death of Austa’s dream of mimicking the Palmers.⁶³

The last eight years of Mansfield French’s life were not entirely ineffective—to the contrary, once he found his evangelistic groove again he was as powerful as ever, and revivals broke out almost wherever he preached. Yet the scope of his influence was regrettably small according to a number of scales of comparison—his tours in Ohio and beyond in the 1850s, the reach and prestige of *Beauty of Holiness* at its peak, his several impactful efforts for Southern blacks, and the immense Holiness productions of this very period in which French took no part. If he had gotten his wish to move to the St. Louis area and start fresh, there is no guarantee that it would have worked—he was still overextended in financial obligations that were his own fault, not Austa’s, and whether startup capital for a new magazine would have materialized is dubious. Nevertheless, with his talent and in an expanding population he at least had a fighting chance. Unfortunately, the Frenches’ poor financial decision-making doomed them to a strangulation that limited Mansfield’s reach and kept Austa from ever getting hers back. Their decision to buy 303 East 51st Street emerged on one side out of Mansfield’s

⁶³ “Methodism at Rutherford Park,” *Christian Advocate*, October 5, 1871; M. French to A. French, August 6, 1872, FFP; M. French to H. French, December 20, 1871, FFP; M. French to H. French, December 19, 1872, FFP; M. French to A. French, August 1, 6, date unknown, 1873, July 15, 1874, September 13, 1875, FFP; M. French to A. French, date unknown (Choice Letters, 170), FFP; M. French to H. French, January 6, 1875, FFP; M. French to H. French, date unknown (1875, “I engaged a wagon . . .”), FFP; M. French to M. J. and H. French, July 27, 1875, FFP; M. French to A. French, September 13, 1875, FFP; M. French to A. French, September 17, 1875, FFP.

callousness toward Austa's sense of calling to *Beauty of Holiness* and his subsequent regret, and on the other side out of Austa's all-consuming desire for editorial control and revanche in the face of the Palmers' betrayal. Yet that was only one poor decision, even though it was enormously consequential. In a whole series of financial choices in the 1860s and '70s, each spouse was more or less characterized by compulsive acquisitiveness (especially Mansfield), unwillingness to liquidate his or her own assets when exigencies required it (especially Austa), and vastly inflated confidence in his or her own market judgment (both).

To her credit, Austa's faith that she and Mansfield would be divinely provided for was vindicated in amazing fashion through the odyssey of those years. Somehow, against all odds and in ways that we will ever know, they kept their two New York houses out of foreclosure and retained many other landholdings besides. Yet this was never supposed to be an end unto itself—it was supposed to facilitate ministry that Austa's stubborn faith ironically prevented from flourishing as it might have otherwise. Mansfield's rueful observation that “[o]ur effort to get means has made us *poor indeed*” was true in more ways than perhaps he knew.⁶⁴

The Frenches' Children

Mansfield and Austa French were the parents of seven children. The second (Sarah True) and sixth (Laura Adorna) died in infancy. The fifth, Grace Ruth, died in 1853 at the age of seven. Four children survived to adulthood.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ M. French to A. French, May 30, 1870, FFP.

⁶⁵ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 114, 125.

Eliza Minerva French (her middle name taken from Mansfield's sister) was born in Gambier, Ohio, home of Kenyon College, in 1834. She excelled both academically and spiritually and made her parents proud. Although Mansfield was concerned about her spiritual condition because of her novel reading and certain acquaintances when she attended Cincinnati's Ohio Female College as a twenty-year-old, he also observed that she was powerfully affected by James Caughey's ministry when French was assisting him in the city. Eliza joined her parents on the faculty of Xenia Female Seminary and moved with them to New York in 1859, where she continued to teach. "Lidie," as she was nicknamed (curiously, the name does not appear in letters until she was an adult) became a devoted wife, mother of six (five surviving childhood), and Methodist laywoman. That tripartite career was launched when she married George Lansing Taylor in 1861, whom she met when he was a student at Ohio Wesleyan University three years earlier.⁶⁶

George Lansing Taylor was such a remarkable and beloved addition to the French family that he deserves description in his own right. A Yankee born and raised in central New York, Taylor transferred from Ohio Wesleyan University to Wesleyan College in Connecticut and then to Columbia College in New York City. By 1864 he earned an A.M. to accompany his bachelor's degree and was on his way to becoming a celebrated poet. Yet his vocation was pastoral ministry, in which he served in the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for his whole career.⁶⁷

Taylor and his father-in-law enjoyed a loving and mutually admiring relationship,

⁶⁶ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 108-11; M. French to A. French February 8, 1854, FFP; M. French to E. French, February 14, 1854, FFP; M. French to A. French, February 23, 1854, FFP; M. French to A. French, March 24, 1854, FFP.

⁶⁷ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 111-12

and the two men perfectly exemplified both the commonalities and contrasts evident in the dramatic evolution of the Methodist ministry from the early to the late nineteenth century. As outlined by David Hempton, French was the model of a legendary style of ministry that was quickly fading away in the decade after the Civil War. The great preachers of his mold possessed

a robust constitution; a capacity for endurance; a commanding personal appearance; a voice sufficiently powerful for preaching at camp meetings; an ability to “affect” an audience; a capacity for weeping; an ability to produce religious revivals and spiritual fruit; an earnest and candid disposition; plain speaking; a good-hearted, generous, and sociable personality; evangelical unction; a passion for reforming causes (temperance, teetotalism, and antislavery); practical and scriptural preaching; frugality and exactness; demonstrated experience of special providential guidance; a fixed gaze on doing good in the here and now with the hope of eternal rewards in the hereafter; a meek, gentle, and childlike spirit; a melodious voice for singing; a keen wit; a capacity for explosive shouts of praise and enthusiasm; a desire for learning and education; a carelessness about material comforts; an ability to confound the rich, the learned, and the powerful; a willingness to celebrate the contribution of “mothers in Israel”; and above all the experience of a good death (peaceful, thankful, faithful, and anticipatory).

It was not coincidental that most of the residue of French’s ministry was spent in rural areas and small towns, where traveling preachers like him had earlier invested the vast bulk of their labors.⁶⁸

Taylor was not altogether unlike his father-in-law. Like French he was a thoroughgoing evangelical with respect to the supreme necessity of a decisive, voluntary conversion, and he zealously facilitated his fair share of revivals, even (on rare occasions) with shouting. He also stood out conspicuously during the Civil War as an ardent, abolitionist Republican. Yet as we will see in the next chapter, Taylor kept at most a

⁶⁸ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 126-27.

tenuous hold on the doctrine of entire sanctification. He typified a new breed of minister especially suited to the swelling ranks of Methodists who had climbed into the middle class and who inhabited the nation's exploding cities. A significant fraction of Taylor's ministry was spent in Brooklyn and New York, including a brief and troubled tenure at the prestigious Allen Street Church, the home of Walter and Phoebe Palmer and before them Nathan Bangs. The most eminent Methodist ministers of Taylor's generation were characterized by

learning and self-improvement; the ability to hold a large and intelligent congregation; a preaching ministry informed by careful preparation; facility of expression; clarity of thought and freshness of style; a status that could not be disparaged by other denominations; a capacity to keep pace with the best thought of the age; a reputation for philanthropy; and evidence of educational and intellectual attainment.⁶⁹

Taylor demonstrated both his reputation as one of Northern Methodism's rising stars and also his kinship to his father-in-law through his involvement with higher education. At the age of thirty-four he was offered the presidency of Iowa Wesleyan University, which he declined. The next year he took a leading role in the long-overdue formation of a flagship Methodist college for New York State—Syracuse University—which he served as a trustee for the rest of his life.⁷⁰

It is not inaccurate to call George Lansing Taylor the son that Mansfield French never had, because his other three sons disappointed their parents' expectations educationally and, in at least one case, spiritually. In 1869 Mansfield remembered what

⁶⁹ "Extracts of Journal of Rev. George Lansing Taylor, D.D., L.H.D.," FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, May 25, 1863, FFP; E. Taylor to M. French and A. French, March 10, 1868, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, November 8, 1869, March 15, 19, 1870, FFP; Hempton, *Methodism*, 127.

⁷⁰ George Lansing Taylor to M. French, August 28, 1869, FFP; "Extracts of Journal of Rev. George Lansing Taylor, D.D., L.H.D.," pp. 20-21, FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 112.

Austa had often told him, that “we have cultivated everybody’s vineyard & left our own to go to weeds. I feel more anxious to see our sons converted and useful, than for anything else. I think they might be more likely to get converted, if we were not with them. Our presence, seems to be a hindrance—strange as it may seem.” By 1869 the parents’ presence did seem to be a roadblock as relationships were sometimes tense, and both Mansfield and Austa were strongly overbearing, but as Mansfield implied, his absence at earlier stages may have had more to do with the sons’ outcomes.⁷¹

These dynamics are most vividly and poignantly displayed in the third (second surviving) child, Winchell Mansfield French, born in Granville, Ohio in 1838. As a maturing boy, Winchell was given responsibility to take care of much in the French home in Delaware when Mansfield traveled as an agent for Ohio Wesleyan in the early 1850s. Winchell attended preparatory school and then college at Ohio Wesleyan from 1853 through the end of the decade. Beginning a lifelong pattern, Winchell dabbled in business by opening a store in Delaware in 1857 and tried to lean on his financially strapped and nervous father to finance it. Mansfield was a loving father, but he was always heavy on admonitions to all of his children. By 1859-60, when Mansfield was severely stressed trying to make *Beauty of Holiness* profitable enough to support his family, these warnings turned into probing questions about the shiftless Winchell’s aims in life. “Do you feel the Lord calls you to preach the gospel?” he asked. “What is to be your cause through life? We will work hard & deny ourselves to the utmost to aid our children. Can you now work your own way?” Austa inquired after his spiritual condition. She tried to push Winchell

⁷¹ M. French to A. French, July 29, 1869, FFP.

through college, but he never graduated.⁷²

After quitting school Winchell joined his parents in New York. In 1862 Mansfield's relationship with Salmon P. Chase won Winchell a job in the Customs House, which he lost at least in part through the controversy over the launch of the *Free South*. Winchell also started a drug store in New York and assisted his mother with the publication of *Slavery in South Carolina* and *Beauty of Holiness*, doing neither altogether reliably. In 1864 he joined his father and younger brother Mansfield Joshua in Beaufort working a temporary job in the commissary there with the thought of starting a new business. Here he appeared to make a major turnaround. He eschewed going out in the evenings to stay home and study, he started a Bible class for freedpeople, and he became convinced that he was called to preach. Yet this conviction quickly evaporated. He spent the next three years in the South trying to find his way in business, at least partly through attempts at cotton dealing, while borrowing money and favors from his family members. In 1868 he went to work for Mansfield Joshua exhuming the bodies of fallen Union soldiers in the South for transport and permanent burial in national cemeteries.⁷³

How and why Winchell's beliefs and values evolved from his boyhood to his

⁷² See pp. 158-59; M. French and E. French to A. French, January 18, 1853, FFP; M. French to W. French, September 12, 1856, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 11, 1857, FFP; M. French to W. French, September 19, 1859, FFP; M. French to W. French, February 28, 1860, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, May 9, 1860, FFP; A. French to M. French, October 18, 1866, FFP.

⁷³ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, February 28, 1862; Port Royal Correspondence, pp. 76-77; Records of the Fifth Special Agency; Records of Civil War Special Agencies of the Treasury Department, Record Group 366; National Archives at College Park; College Park, MD. See pp. 352, 513-15; M. French to W. French, February 16, 1863, FFP; M. J. French to W. French, June 6, 1863, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, September 30, 1863, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, January 14, April 11, June 6, 1864, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, October 25, 1865, FFP; A. French to M. French, March 16, 1866, FFP; A. French to M. French, January 16, 1867, FFP; M. J. French to M. French and A. French, September 2, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, January 8, 1868, FFP; letters from M. J. French to M. French, March 4, 31, April 3, 26, 1868, FFP; W. French to M. French, March 13, 1868, FFP.

aimless manhood in the postwar South is entirely opaque, but by the spring of 1868 his political viewpoint had settled into a position diametrically opposed to his father's. While Mansfield was drumming up all the support he could for Andrew Johnson's conviction, Winchell wrote him a scathing letter that must have broken his father's heart. "I presume you are very much exercised in your efforts to impeach Andy & get your post office as you are promised," Winchell wrote caustically. "If successful impeachment is necessary to you obtaining that lucrative appointment, I trust it will never be yours but remain in the hands of a good democrat who 'wallops niggers & takes his whisky straight'"

Winchell was incensed at the Republican Party, which "shows such a lack of respect for the laws & all precedents" and was groping for a winning issue after its humiliation at the polls the previous year:

They have saddled themselves with our colored brothers (?) and now after petting & coaxing them for two years they would give anything if they could throw him overboard, but the "nigger on the fence" fell over on the Republican side & he stank worse than they imagined and now the question is whether to cover him over or vacate the premises themselves. Universal suffrage is all very well before it is tried but when they won't obey us nor vote for us nor adopt our platforms they need a little of the cat [o' nine tails] & as our authority over them is not so great as that they were once subjected to the Republican party cries out in agony, "Who shall rid me of this burden? Any sufferings are greater than I can bear," & they will soon vomit him forth & be obliged by their constituents to call themselves the white man's party & America for white men. . . .

If this was not searing enough, Winchell drove in the point even deeper:

[T]he only issue is who shall rule one third of the people of the country, ignorant, debased, superstitious blacks or white men in whose hands only is there any hope of the South, & not in northern negroes & migratory schoolmasters in search of plunder & power regardless of the interests of the country. . . ."⁷⁴

Whether and how Mansfield responded to Winchell's bitter invective is unknown,

⁷⁴ W. French to M. French, March 13, 1868, FFP.

but the son's political principles did not keep him from contemplating riding on his father's coattails. Almost broke, Winchell married Emma Morrill, considered going into business with her friends in New York, and hoped to get a job in Washington through Mansfield's influence if the latter won his Senate race. With his father's loss, he instead followed Mansfield Joshua to Kansas, where the younger brother had invested in land, and briefly became a hotel clerk. He came back to New York and then returned to Beaufort, where he dealt cotton and rice and oversaw the grading of a portion of the Port Royal Railroad.⁷⁵

Before Winchell left New York, discouraged and out of money, his brother-in-law George Lansing Taylor took him aside for a candid one-on-one conversation. Taylor then wrote a strong letter to his father-in-law that sheds intriguing light on the relationship between Winchell and his parents. Taylor saw hopeful signs that his talk with Winchell set him on the path to salvation, which Taylor yearned for as he "never felt for any other soul." Taylor lent Winchell as much money as he could and urged Mansfield French, dangling in Miss St. John's employ under the strain of the obligations of his properties, to do the same:

If you could lend him \$100. or even \$50. in a letter of encouragement and strong *cheer*, it would be the best sermon you could preach to him or any other man on Earth. I need not remind you that he is *your son*, and worth more to you than houses or lands. *His Mother should remember the same thing.* . . . But he'll never be saved by prayers or exhortations or tears alone. His case demands warm loving sympathy, and practical investment in *works*.

Mansfield, who was frustrated at how Winchell "neglects his [spiritual] duty" and certain

⁷⁵ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 114; M. French to A. French, June 9, 1868, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 16, 1868, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, October 4, 1868, FFP; M. J. French to M. French to October 6, 1868, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, October 1, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, January 21, 1870, FFP; M. French to W. French, January 27, 1870, FFP.

that he would continue to fail in life “until he gives his heart to Christ,” nevertheless responded to Taylor’s plea by asking Winchell to manage Mansfield’s property situation in South Carolina. Austa was certain that he would foul it up.⁷⁶

Winchell seems to have handled matters to Mansfield’s satisfaction, but in 1871 he started a new line of work with an ambiguous relationship to his father’s legacy. James Thompson was interested in getting back into the newspaper business in Beaufort; he and Winchell bought the town’s two papers and combined them to form the *Beaufort Tribune*, Winchell publishing and Thompson editing. How long Thompson participated in the venture is unknown, but Winchell operated the paper through the end of the decade. The new paper was far different ideologically from Thompson’s earlier venture, the *Free South*; Winchell declared himself and the *Tribune* independent, but he used it to display the staunchly conservative posture that he revealed during Johnson’s impeachment trial. In 1876 Winchell delighted in the rebirth of the Democratic Party in Beaufort. Paying lip-service to the reemergence of a two-party democracy, he asserted that if Northern whites become convinced “that the colored vote is subversive of the best interests” of the South because blacks elected unscrupulous leaders, Northerners would not hesitate to take away the suffrage that they had bestowed a decade before. That year Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was elected in a contested and controversial presidential race; the price of his election was the withdrawal of an active federal presence in the South and the end of Reconstruction. The election two years later had no federal watchdogs, and blacks and

⁷⁶ George Lansing Taylor to M. French, October 1, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, May 30, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, July 29, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, November 23, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, December 1, 1869, FFP.

Republicans were being driven out of Southern politics for the next century. Teacher Laura Towne still lived on the Sea Islands and wrote chillingly of Winchell's role in local politics:

Political times are simply frightful. Men are shot at, hounded down, trapped, and held till certain meetings are over, and intimidated in every possible way. It gets worse and worse as election approaches. Mr. French, of the Beaufort *Tribune*, says, "In order to prevent our county falling into such hands (Republican), *any* measures that will accomplish the end will be justifiable, *however wicked* they might be in other communities." Upon this plan is the whole campaign conducted.⁷⁷

Winchell left Beaufort and the paper around 1880. He also left his wife, with whom he had no children, probably a few years earlier: in 1877, the year after Mansfield's death, the rest of his survivors conveyed their shares in the ownership of the Tabby Manse to Emma. (Winchell had already given his stake up.) He moved from one city to the next in Georgia and Florida, now in the hotel business, now in cement. He moved back to Beaufort in 1895 but happened to be away in Florida three years later when his wife died, and he did not return for the funeral. Eliza believed that Winchell had rejected a call to ministry from God and forever blamed her brother's failures on it.⁷⁸

The Frenches' fourth child (third surviving), Mansfield Joshua French, was not a failure, but he was not a minister either. Born in Circleville in 1843, Mansfield Joshua was known by his middle (and grandfather's) name as a boy and his first (father's) name as a man. His father was traveling on the circuit or as a university agent for almost his

⁷⁷ M. French to H. French, December 11, 1871, FFP; Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), NOOK e-book, 316-18; Rupert Sargent Holland, ed. *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884* (Cambridge, MA: n.p., 1912), 288-89.

⁷⁸ Genealogical Notebook No. 6, p. 24, FFP; *Deed Book Eleven*, pp. 73-75, Register of Deeds Office, Beaufort County, Beaufort, SC; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 114.

entire youth. He studied in the preparatory department at Ohio Wesleyan and then spent 1858-62 in academies in Cleveland and Fort Edward, New York. He never attended college. Mansfield Joshua had the instincts, talent, and above all prudence for business that his brother Winchell—and for that matter his father—lacked. Through his father's intercession he moved to Beaufort in 1862 and worked as a clerk and a commissary manager in the Department of the South, and he favorably impressed the Northern community there. He engaged in a series of successful enterprises under the shelter of the Union Army during and after the war—cotton planting, retail stores, and exhuming and transferring the bodies of Federal soldiers—deftly turning sizable profits in each. After buying and briefly living on a large farm in Kansas in 1868, Mansfield Joshua settled into a patronage job in the U.S. Internal Revenue office in New York City the next year and continued working for federal government until 1876. After a bout with illness that it took him two years to recover from, Mansfield Joshua relocated to Syracuse where he became one of the city's prominent businessmen, dealing in cement and sewer pipe and also in interior slate and marble. He was married twice and had eight children, six surviving childhood. In Syracuse Mansfield Joshua remained a Republican and a Methodist like his father and sent four of his children to the city's Methodist university. At least during his father's lifetime, however, Mansfield Joshua maintained a certain distance on matters of faith, which kept his parents worried about his spiritual state.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 116-18; M. French to W. French, March 9, 1858, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, October 30, 1858, FFP; M. French to M. J. French, February 2, 1860, FFP; W. French to M. French, July 7, 1862, FFP; M. French to George Lansing and E. Taylor, September 11, 1862, FFP; M. French to H. French, February 19, 1862, FFP; M. French to A. French, April 2, 1864, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 6, 1864, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, October 25, 1865, FFP; W. French to M. French, March 13, 1868, FFP.

The Frenches' youngest child managed to combine Eliza's religious sensitivity, Winchell's aimlessness (at first), and something like Mansfield Joshua's business acumen (eventually). Hamline Quigley French, born in Chesterville, Ohio in 1850, was named for Methodist bishop Leonidas Lent Hamline and for Mansfield's presiding elder in the Mount Vernon District, John Quigley. Hamline was eleven years old when his father left for Port Royal and missed him badly during those years. The impact of Mansfield's absence was significant: in 1863 George Lansing Taylor, who temporarily kept Hamline while his mother convalesced at Saratoga, observed to Mansfield that Hamline knew "scarcely anything of *real discipline* from long inaction." Hamline was affectionate with his parents, sincere in his faith, and generally affable, but his aversion to discipline (including self-discipline) seriously mitigated his educational success. He studied at a school in Claverack, New York in 1865-66 and hated its governance, earning expulsion when he spoke heatedly to a faculty member after being wrongly accused of a minor crime. Austa was as enamored of Hamline as she was dissatisfied with Winchell. She got him into a school in East Hampton, Massachusetts, desperate for one of her sons to earn a college degree. Hamline loved his mother too, but even he was embarrassed when she moved in with him to push him in his schoolwork (contrary to her desire not to push him). Hamline's nemesis was ancient languages, hating them so much—he wished that Cicero "had never lived"—that he cut recitations and blamed his failure on his parents' neglect.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ M. J. French to M. French, August 26, 1863, FFP; George Lansing Taylor to M. French, September 30, 1863, FFP; letters from A. French to M. French to January 3, February 5, September 21, October 13, October 18, 1866, January 14, 1867, FFP.

Austa finally gave up, and in 1867 Hamline moved in with his father in Charleston, where he worked as a clerk for Robert K. Scott. He spent 1869 in New York loafing, hoping employment would turn up, working a couple short-run jobs, and frustrating his parents with his unwillingness to finish his education or commit to Christian ministry. In 1870 he turned over a new leaf spiritually, and he married Ida Launitz in 1872. Of Mansfield and Austa's children, Hamline and Ida remained the closest physically and financially to the parents in their last years. Despite financial struggles, Hamline eventually found his way in the monument (gravestone) business. Like his parents, he had seven children, four surviving childhood.⁸¹

The End of a Ministry

From 1869 on, Mansfield French suffered more frequent illnesses, including recurring severe chills. On March 1, 1876 he entered his final sickness. Several weeks earlier he told his congregation in Pearsalls his premonition that "something dreadful is going to happen to this Church. It may be that I am going to be taken away, or some of these prominent brethren." On February 20, at George Lansing Taylor's church in New Haven, Connecticut, he preached his last sermon, which his son-in-law remembered as "one of those characteristic Old Testament discourses which were so marked a feature of his ministry." Ten days later he endured a bout of dysentery followed by "symptoms of

⁸¹ M. French to H. French, November 28, 1867, FFP; M. French to A. French, May 30, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, June 2, 1869, FFP; H. French to M. French, July 6, 1869, FFP; M. J. French to M. French, July 20, 1869, FFP; A. French to M. French, November 16, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, November 29, 1869, FFP; M. French to H. French, December 21, 1869, FFP; M. French to A. French, January 28, 1870, FFP; M. French to H. French, May 12, 1874, FFP; H. French to M. French, September 9, 1875, FFP; French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 117, 125.

heart disease” that included near-fainting spells. In the hallowed tradition of the “good death” of the righteous, Taylor recorded French’s utterances over his last two weeks. Austa asked him if he would “rather come back the long way to health again, or go to heaven now.” He replied that he only wished to “come back” to spare her a “great trial . . . but if I leave you, you will come very soon, and then O how glad we shall be to be there!” Taylor described serene and painless final hours as French floated in and out of consciousness, aware that his end was nigh. “I am going through the valley of the shadow—who has any anxiety?” he told Austa and Eliza. “I shall soon be with Jesus. How sweet to die in the will of the Lord! . . . Luxurious! luxurious! O that I could tell you how s-w-e-e-t!” As his life ebbed away he remembered two men whose conversion was in doubt. “Dear Winchell!” he murmured. “I don’t know but if I am taken away it may be the means of his doing his duty.” He also looked up and saw an unconverted man standing at the foot of his bed who had been helping to keep him comfortable. “Is that you, Brother Duryea?” he asked. “O, Brother Duryea, if I could only tell you how I love you!” Duryea “melted” and vowed “never to rest until he was ready to meet Brother French in heaven.”⁸²

Mansfield French’s plea to Duryea comprised his last words. He died on March 15, 1876 at the Methodist parsonage in Pearsalls at the age of sixty-six and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in what is today the Bronx, New York.⁸³

⁸² M. French to M. J. French, August 16, 1869, FFP; letters from M. French to A. French, date unknown (“Yesterday I rode out in cars . . .”), May 23, June 1, date unknown (“Yesterday I had agreed to preach . . .”), 1870, August 6, 1873, September 11, 1874, September 13, 1875, FFP; George Lansing Taylor, “Rev. Mansfield French—Last Things,” *Christian Advocate*, May 11, 1876.

⁸³ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 105-6.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEGACY

“French remained to the last an enigma. . . .”

—Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (1964)

Remembering and Forgetting Mansfield French

The collective activity of memory-making over Mansfield French’s life began in earnest in the several days after his death, when lengthy obituaries appeared in major New York newspapers and two funerals were held, one in Pearsalls and another at Seventh Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, the congregation that Mansfield and Austa became members of when they moved to the city in 1858. French would surely have been gratified by the *New York Tribune*’s accurate summary of him as “a prominent Methodist minister, and a widely known friend of the colored race. . . . As an evangelist, educator, religious journalist, and philanthropist, Mr. French had spent a varied, active, and highly useful life”—exactly what he strove to do from his youth up.¹ The *Tribune* included a thorough (if imprecise) catalog of French’s educational exploits in Ohio, but, being the most progressive paper of general readership in New York during the Civil War, most of its space was devoted to the story of French’s leadership in getting the Port Royal Experiment rolling despite opposition. (The contribution of Edward L. Pierce and Boston went unmentioned.) Old abolitionist William Cullen Bryant printed the same obituary in the *Evening Post* but added information that he believed to be essential:

He was an ardent abolitionist and conceived the idea of enlisting negroes under

¹ See pp. 13-15.

the national flag. He passed three days in conference with Secretary Stanton on this point, and finally prevailed. He also was mainly instrumental in obtaining permission for negroes to pre-empt land on the valuable sea islands of the south, thus saving many of them from the demoralizing effects of idleness. In all acts benefitting the negroes he was one of the prime movers, and his name should always be remembered by them with affection. After the war he labored to effect the liberation of slaves in Cuba, and finally resumed his labors as a minister of the New York East Conference.²

The *Tribune* and the *Evening Post* probably found much of their material within their own archives (or, in Bryant's case, perhaps personal recollection), but the individual who supplied the rest of the content was George Lansing Taylor.³ Taylor's biographical summary also formed the basis of the obituary in the *New York Herald*. It was no small irony that the *Herald* announced that French "survived the oblivion of all the aspersions malicious partisans cast upon him during the war," since those partisans included the *Herald* itself.⁴ Even though all the newspapers had the same source, their selection of material was different. The *Herald* included more about French's childhood. Although it, like the other papers, called French a "fervent and . . . successful pastor," it added that "hundreds [were] brought into the church through his labors." Also, although the *Herald* mentioned the beginning of the Port Royal Experiment (carefully avoiding the term "abolitionist"), it spent a considerable amount of space describing (and somewhat exaggerating) French's role in organizing the 1st South Carolina Volunteers. The *Herald* was the only paper to recount French's activities in the South after the war. It mentioned

² George Lansing Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," typescript, French Family Papers, 1831-1945, Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center, Syracuse, NY; *New York Tribune*, March 17, 1876, manuscript copy, FFP (3F21-035-038); *Evening Post*, March 17, 1876, manuscript copy, FFP (3F21-039-040)

³ Compare Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," FFP, with all obituaries mentioned.

⁴ See pp. 257, 359.

French's tours of South Carolina and Georgia in 1865 and also French's Senate run, explaining that "being more of a philanthropist than a politician, he withdrew from the canvass which his friends had begun in his behalf, preferring to work in the line of duty which better suited his convictions and his training." This clearly had already become a more pleasant way for the family to remember the episode than the bluntness of French's defeat.⁵

In South Carolina, Winchell French reprinted the *Herald's* obituary in his *Beaufort Tribune*. Whether for political reasons (in the face of the upcoming election), personal reasons (in order to make his father more palatable to his white Southern friends), or both, Winchell excised the portions of the article about the successful 1862 coastal raid—an operation that the *Herald* said French "actually commanded"—and the "poetical retribution" when French announced emancipation on Robert Toombs' doorstep.⁶

Taylor's most striking assertion, which also found its way into the *Herald's* obituary, was that French's "private papers for this period contain the original draft of the act of Congress organizing the Freedman's Bureau, which was his original conception." What document Taylor referred to is anyone's guess: there is none that fits that description in what remains of French's papers today. Indeed, the first version of the first Freedmen's Bureau Bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Thomas D. Eliot, with whom French had no documented contact. French also had no known

⁵ "Rev. Mansfield French," *New York Herald*, March 17, 1876, clipping, FFP (3F21-074). According to the *Herald*, when Edwin M. Stanton gave French the authorization to enlist black troops he warned him, "For Heaven's sake don't let the NEW YORK HERALD get hold of this!"

⁶ "Rev. Mansfield French," *New York Herald*, March 17, 1876; *Beaufort Tribune*, March 22, 1876.

interaction with the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, whose report and recommendations formed the official conceptual origin of the Bureau. Part of Taylor's confusion stems from his misinformed belief that the Freedmen's Bureau was simply a reconstitution of the National Freedmen's Relief Association, yet that does not entirely solve the puzzle. That there was some document, now lost, that links French to the origin of the legislation that established the Freedmen's Bureau is highly probable: the *Herald* also cites French's recommendation from congressional radicals for a Senate seat, and that document still exists. What the connection was, however, remains a mystery.⁷

That the funeral at Seventh Street Church was a grand affair was evident from its four principal speakers. In addition to a Methodist reverend doctor named Curry, who gave the overview of French's life, were William Cullen Bryant, who spoke of French's activities during the war; General Clinton B. Fisk, who talked about French's work in the Freedmen's Bureau; and Bishop Edmund Janes, who spoke of French's "religious life." The funeral anticipated remembrance at the New York East Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church that spring. Curry submitted the official memoir (which like the newspaper obituaries corresponds closely to George Lansing Taylor's memorial) to be entered into the minutes of the conference. Other colleagues followed with their remarks. One spoke of how French boldly demanded the abolition of slavery at a meeting for the promotion of holiness in New York and how he "believed the freedom of the slaves chimed as fully in his heart with the idea of Christian salvation, as anything could."

⁷ Taylor, "Biography of Rev. Mansfield French," FFP; "Rev. Mansfield French," *New York Herald*, March 17, 1876; "Bureau of Emancipation," *Congressional Globe*, 38th Congress, 1st Sess., No. 2 (Dec. 16, 1863), 19; see p. 428 above; James Harlan to Robert K. Scott, April 7, 1868, FFP.

Another called him “a man of decision, and not afraid to rebuke sin in any form that it might present itself,” including, interestingly, neglecting the Sabbath. More interestingly, one colleague who knew French from Xenia recounted that as early as 1855 he was known as “Father French”—later a term of derision on the Sea Islands—because “he was a father in reality to all who came under his observation and care.”⁸

It is appropriate that Mansfield French died in 1876, the year that Rutherford B. Hayes’ election to the presidency ended Reconstruction. As the United States entered its second century, Northern whites wished to remember the late Civil War as the birth pains of a new, united nation. Their focus was on reconciliation with their honorable Southern brothers, which the abolition of slavery made possible. They had no desire to view the war as a critical step in a struggle for racial justice, which partly due to their apathy was tumbling backward. With peace and Union the supreme values, the North preferred not to remember unruly abolitionists as heroes.⁹

Accordingly, French’s memory in the nation at large quickly fell into obscurity. The only published portrayal of him for many years after 1876 appears to have been in *Lamb’s Biographical Dictionary of the United States* in 1900, where he was described as an Ohio educator who led the mission to contrabands at Port Royal. (Amazingly, he was also remembered as the mastermind of a raid to tap a Confederate telegraph wire.)¹⁰ Hints

⁸ *Christian Advocate*, March 23, 1876, manuscript copy, FFP (3F21-033-034); Minutes of the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1876, 62-63; “Dead Clergymen Eulogized at the Conference,” clipping, FFP (3F30-024).

⁹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁰ John Howard Brown, ed., *Lamb’s Biographical Dictionary of the United States* (Boston: James H. Lamb Co., 1900), s.v. “French, Mansfield.” See also p. 382 n. 259 above.

of French's educational career also appeared amid the multitude of local histories published beginning in the late nineteenth century, specifically in Heath, Marietta, Granville, and Xenia. Wilberforce University was the only one of the three surviving schools French was associated with that perpetuated his memory to any extent.¹¹ As for the Port Royal Experiment—which itself ebbed rapidly from common knowledge—French's memory was confined to a handful of sometimes derogatory references (lacking his first name) in the journals and letters of those who passed through the Sea Islands during the war, published about fifty years afterward. His activities in Reconstruction were entirely forgotten.

In the same way that French's contribution to abolitionism was lost, his career as a Methodist preacher also disappeared from memory for several reasons stemming from his peculiar relationship to the Holiness Movement. First, movement historian Melvin Easterday Dieter observed that individual nineteenth-century revivalists from the Calvinistic tradition (such as Charles Grandison Finney) are much better known than their Wesleyan contemporaries, because those with Calvinistic roots drew attention by their independence whereas the Wesleyans were members of organized revivalistic conglomerates (principally the Methodist Episcopal Church). Second, although the Frenches' prominence was well known in the Methodist center of the movement, they had little substantial involvement in it after the sale of *Beauty of Holiness* to Walter and Phoebe Palmer twelve years before French died. The Frenches' significance was eclipsed by the new generation of leaders, not to mention by the Palmers themselves, who

¹¹ "Subscription Book Used 60 Years Ago," FFP.

effectively swallowed up the Frenches when they swallowed up their magazine. By dropping the word “*Beauty*” from the merged periodical and retaining “*Guide*,” the Palmers guaranteed that their dizzyingly ascendant publication would forever be seen as the apotheosis of Timothy Merritt’s *Guide to Christian Perfection*. If the *Beauty* was remembered at all, it was as a footnote whose absorption was inevitable. Such was the portrayal by Walter Palmer’s partner and admiring biographer George Hughes, which influenced later scholarly studies of Phoebe. In the annals of the Holiness Movement from the mid-nineteenth century onward Mansfield and Austa French were hidden in the glare of Phoebe Palmer’s star power.¹²

Besides the Frenches’ loss of eminence in the Holiness Movement, in the last few years of Mansfield’s life the movement itself began to suffer blows that presaged its rancorous break from its seedbed, the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1872, the very year that six bishops associated with the movement were elected, voices began to be raised against the revivalistic tactics being employed to bring believers into perfection. These criticisms set the table for critiques of the doctrine of entire sanctification itself as it was proclaimed by Phoebe Palmer, John S. Inskip, and others. Holiness advocates responded with recriminations that the church had lost its moorings as its members increased in wealth and social standing and decreased in spiritual hunger and zeal and as its

¹² Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Studies in Evangelicalism I, Donald W. Dayton and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 7-8; George Hughes, *The Beloved Physician: Walter C. Palmer, M.D., and His Sun-Lit Journey to the Celestial City* (New York: Palmer and Hughes, 1884), 227; George Hughes, *Fragrant Memories of the Tuesday Meeting and the Guide to Holiness, and Their Fifty Years’ Work for Jesus* (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1886), 173-77. Cf. Charles Edward White, *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 92-94; Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 47-48.

congregations relaxed membership standards and discipline. The Holiness Movement had long been an ecumenical movement with the Methodist Episcopal Church at its center. Increasingly, however, the movement not only appealed beyond that denomination as always but became an independent, quasi-denominational force increasingly at odds with the Methodist ecclesiastical structure—ironically (or perhaps fittingly) like Methodism itself was vis-à-vis the Church of England in John Wesley’s day. By the end of the century frustrations on both sides resulted in large defections from the Methodist Episcopal Church and other denominations to form new Holiness churches. Each side moved on without the other, both claiming the mantle of John Wesley.¹³

Even while the Holiness Movement was still booming at the time of Mansfield French’s death, the church’s eventual distance from perfectionistic experience was anticipated by the principal framer of French’s legacy, George Lansing Taylor. In 1868 Taylor wrote in his journal that he was “a happy man, and long[ed] to be a holier one,” which hinted at a gradualism out of sync with the immediatism of contemporary Holiness teaching. When Mansfield and Austa French died, Taylor used his standing and gift with words to excise the doctrine of entire sanctification as much as possible from their motivations and life’s work. Although Taylor was still happy to recount the “hundreds . . . converted on [Mansfield French’s] various charges,” he explained that French moved from the Protestant Episcopal Church to Methodism because he found the former’s “rigidity and exclusiveness so incompatible with his evangelistic and catholic charity”—a subtle swipe at Holiness advocates’ growing reputation for divisiveness. Taylor’s account

¹³ Dieter, *Holiness Revival*, 127-36, 204-75.

is not entirely untrue; however, Methodism's primary attraction to both Frenches in 1843 was its teaching on sanctification: Mansfield's ecumenism centered around perfectionism and abolitionism, and he was dissatisfied with the Episcopal Church because it dismissed both. In Taylor's biographical synopsis of Mansfield French, he briefly mentioned that French published *Beauty of Holiness* as a "religious monthly" while carefully neglecting to specify its subject matter. In a ten-page biography of Austa that Taylor wrote after her death in 1880, he said no more than that Austa wrote "impassioned editorials" in the magazine "for the cause of Christian holiness which lay so near her heart."¹⁴

In sum, Mansfield French was forgotten by a country that denied his abolitionism and by a church that shunned his perfectionism. That he was remembered at all, in whatever arcane fashion, can be credited to two individuals.

The first is French's grandson Mansfield Joseph French. This son of Mansfield Joshua was a civil engineer and amateur historian who in 1940 completed an ambitious project to trace his family's genealogical history. The resultant 354-page tome (plus appendix and index)¹⁵ includes a compact but substantial biography of his revered grandfather that he derived from a combination of personal research into institutional records, newspapers, and books; the recollections of his father and of George and Eliza Taylor; and a large quantity of Mansfield's letters and other papers preserved in the family. Given what Mansfield Joseph had to work with, he did an outstanding job,

¹⁴ "Extracts of Journal of Rev. George Lansing Taylor, D.D., L.H.D.," p. 1, FFP; Minutes of the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1876, 62; Taylor, "Biography," FFP; George Lansing Taylor, *Mrs. Austa M. French: A Biographical Sketch* (New York: Phillips & Hunt), 1880, FFP.

¹⁵ Mansfield Joseph French, *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut* (Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brothers, 1940).

although his product contains several unsurprising defects in addition to various inaccurate details. First, the Mansfield French on the pages of Joseph's book was faultless, although the grandson did mention Benjamin C. Truman's 1866 libel in order to refute it decisively. Second, Joseph found the correspondence stemming from Mansfield's teaching in Heath and preaching in Ohio odd and fascinating to the point of including an entire letter from an 1845 camp meeting in his book. Nevertheless, he could not interpret what he read in its own religious terms. Following his uncle George Lansing Taylor's lead, Joseph had no concept of the doctrine of Christian perfection or at least gave no evidence that he understood it.

Third, Joseph perpetuated what became Mansfield's chief legacy within the French family: namely, that he was a close friend of Abraham Lincoln and influenced Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. This was first alleged by William Cullen Bryant at French's funeral, and according to George Lansing Taylor, Clinton B. Fisk also claimed that Lincoln told him "that, among all his advisors there was none in whose wisdom he had more confidence than in that of Mr. French." Mansfield Joshua French often related that when his father "told the President that he was the instrument in the hands of God for the freeing of the slaves . . . Lincoln replied, 'Mr. French, I want to be convinced of that; whenever you are in Washington I shall be glad to have you come and talk to me about that.'"¹⁶

The present study demonstrates that these assertions, while not wholly false, are overblown. There is no reason to deny that Lincoln valued French's judgment about

¹⁶ French, *Ancestors and Descendants*, 90-91; *Christian Advocate*, March 23, 1876; Taylor, "Biography," FFP.

policies toward slaves and even more so about the pensive president's providential destiny. However, there is only one recorded instance of French conversing with Lincoln, and it came after Lincoln decided to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. French's individual influence in the administration was not strong, if it ever was, until after the summer of 1862. Moreover, French had an ambivalent relationship with Lincoln. Rather than picturing him typologically as a deliverer like Joshua or Gideon, French compared Lincoln to King Asa, who fortified Judah, formed a massive army, and found military success by eliminating idols from his land, but later failed by relying on arms instead of God for victory.¹⁷ French publicly endorsed Massachusetts governor John A. Andrew for president while Lincoln was in office, and he was tightly allied with Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln's chief rival in his own Cabinet. Unusually, French neither praised nor censured Lincoln as he did many other authority figures, although he did powerfully declaim against his government at times. Nine days after Lincoln's assassination, French called him "noble" but, with startling detachment, he reflected that

God took the work from Moses' hands, on the very borders of Canaan & committed it to the hands of Joshua & Caleb, men of sterner cast of mind. Theirs was the work, of exterminating the Canaanites & locating the tribes. Our Moses had perhaps finished his work. He might have spared the Canaanites, & left them "as thorns in our sides" [Numbers 33:55; Joshua 23:13; Judges 2:3].

As it turned out, Andrew Johnson did that instead.¹⁸

Despite the flaws in Mansfield Joseph French's work, his labors were

¹⁷ 2 Chronicles 14-16.

¹⁸ Mansfield French to Salmon P. Chase, March 8, 1861, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Mansfield French to M. E. Strieby, April 24, 1865, American Missionary Association Archives, H5582, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA; see pp. 306-7, 310 above.

indispensible. He kept the memory of Mansfield French alive in the family, and he collected a trove of his grandfather's papers in one place. Those papers and the rest of the family's collection, including all of Joseph's notes and correspondence from years of work on the genealogy, migrated through the family until they were eventually deposited, uncataloged and disorganized, in the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse, New York.¹⁹

Mansfield Joseph French's opus also proved useful to the person who brought Mansfield French out of family memory and into the view of American historians. In 1964, Willie Lee Rose published her landmark *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*,²⁰ the dissertation for her doctorate at the Johns Hopkins University. Rose's brilliant work came at the height of the Civil Rights Movement as a wave of revisionist scholarship was challenging America's memory of nineteenth-century abolitionists and radical Republicans and rehabilitating their reputations. Rose told the forgotten, meaning-laden drama of the Port Royal mission deftly, complete with humane and incisive profiles of its principal characters, including Mansfield French. She somehow found Mansfield Joseph French's *Ancestors and Descendants of Samuel French the Joiner of Stratford, Connecticut*, and it became her sole source for background on Mansfield French's life (aside from his obituary in the *Beaufort Tribune*). The rest of her material about French came from his letters to the American Missionary Association

¹⁹ The documents, which now reside in four bank boxes and two smaller boxes, are still only partly cataloged and are generally disorganized. In the course of researching this thesis, I transcribed approximately seven hundred single-spaced pages' worth of them. The Onondaga Historical Association Museum and Research Center possesses the transcription, which may also be used as an index to manuscripts in the French Family Papers as they were arranged in 2012.

²⁰ New York: Oxford University Press.

and Salmon P. Chase, the pages of the *Free South*, and the almost entirely negative remarks about him embedded in the extant private writings of his fellow Gideonites. Given her sources, Rose painted an incredibly sympathetic and accurate portrait of French. Nevertheless, M. Joseph French's account was not adequate to explain what made Mansfield French tick, including his zeal for Wesleyan holiness that was of course missing from his grandson's narrative. To Rose therefore, "French remained to the last an enigma."²¹

Rehearsal for Reconstruction was more than an introduction to a fascinating saga that played out in a neglected theater of the American Civil War. It also marked a new departure in the study of the era as a growing number of historians began looking at the Civil War as an element of the history of emancipation rather than the other way around. This new viewpoint reframed the early Reconstruction period as the second act of a single play. As studies multiplied, French began to make cameo appearances in an increasing number of monographs all the way to the present.²² Beginning in the 1980s, a new round of primary source material pertaining the Port Royal Experiment also began to be published—most notably a volume of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*²³—which depicted French, his allies, and his critics in their own words. Those primary sources in addition to French's unpublished papers became crucial

²¹ Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 181.

²² The latest example is Bruce Levine's survey *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South* (New York: Random House, 2013).

²³ Ira Berlin, et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Lower South*, vol. 3 of ser. 1 of *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867; Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Also worthy of mention is John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, 5 vols. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press), 1993–98.

material for the present work.²⁴

How He Did What He Did

Having followed the trail of Mansfield French's life, it is time to return to the question with which this thesis began: "How did Mansfield French do the diverse, world-influencing things that he did?" We will begin by looking at the external circumstances and then the personal qualities that facilitated his vocational journey. None of them are decisive, but the complex interplay of them all made possible a remarkable career.

Some of the circumstances of French's life were the circumstances of the entire nation. One was *population expansion*. When French was born in 1810 the population of the United States was 7,239,881; when French lobbied in Washington for support of Cuban independence in 1870 the national population was 38,558,371, a more than five-fold increase over sixty years.²⁵ Linked to this steep rise in population was rapid *settlement expansion* as Americans pushed westward and cities boomed. Explosive growth generates massive change and with it more vocational opportunities for those with the initiative and wherewithal to seize them. French seized the opportunities to start schools in Ohio in the 1830s, '40s, and '50s and to build a self-supporting magazine in the 1850s and '60s. He sensed a similar opportunity in surging St. Louis in 1869 and would have made a move to reinvent himself there yet again if his wife Austa had been

²⁴ Credit is also due to Gil Wilson, who operates the sole online presence commemorating Mansfield French at <http://www.drbronsontours.com/bronsonrevmansfieldfrench.html>.

²⁵ "1810 Fast Facts," United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1810_fast_facts.html (accessed December 27, 2014); "1870 Fast Facts," United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/1870_fast_facts.html (accessed December 27, 2014).

willing.

French also lived in a time of *vast social change*. That term could apply to any period of his life, but it obviously pertains to the Civil War and early Reconstruction, which comprised a complex of social shifts so enormous that Americans felt as if they lived an entire lifetime in only a few years. The colossal upheaval of that era altered the fortunes of Americans everywhere. It provided opportunities for influential activity that fill three hundred pages of this thesis, and it also did away with the occupation of editor of *Beauty of Holiness* that French left behind when he dove head first into an unprecedented ministry.

Other circumstances that enabled French's career were closer to home. One was the *education* in Vermont and Ohio provided for him by his father to prepare him for ministry. Both French's learning and the status it conveyed opened doors for him for the rest of his life, notably but not exclusively as an educator himself. Yet his education was itself the fruit of Joshua French's *money*. Without it not only could Joshua not have afforded to pay for Mansfield's studies; he also could not have afforded to lose his son's labor. Mansfield was unusually privileged. Furthermore, without the wealth Mansfield received from his father, he could not have broken into the education business in Marietta and reprised the role elsewhere. French was cash-poor for the rest of his life after leaving the Circleville Female Seminary, but he probably retained certain assets in land all the way through. He may have liquidated these or used them to secure loans that made possible other endeavors like buying *Beauty of Holiness*. French proved that with the right start it was possible to conduct an effective multivocational ministry even while

money was extremely tight, but in 1869 and beyond he also proved that large debt obligations and investment overextension were lethal to the flexibility necessary to seize new and diverse opportunities. French knew the Bible intimately, but he would have done well to consider 1 Timothy 6:6-10 more carefully.²⁶

Some of the critical enabling features of French's environment were the people he knew and had relationships with. Opportunities opened for French through *friends in (or from) other places*. French went to Heath because his teacher James Ballard had taught there; he went to Kenyon College because Heman Dyer was studying there; he went to Granville because Austa was from there. His travels on behalf of Wilberforce University (and almost certainly his earlier journeys for Ohio Wesleyan University as well) allowed him to develop a far-flung network of relationships without which *Beauty of Holiness* could not have been marketed effectively and would not have flourished. Those relationships helped to make it feasible for the Frenches to relocate to New York City, and that in turn put French in both the orbit of Phoebe Palmer's Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness and the city's abolitionist community, without which French's leading role in the Port Royal Experiment could not have come about.

As the foregoing suggests, not only friends in other places but *friends in high places* opened opportunities for French that he never would have had otherwise. In the Holiness Movement those friends were principally Walter and Phoebe Palmer, who allowed French to hitch *Beauty of Holiness* to their star in the Revival of 1857-58 and

²⁶ "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

beyond. Obviously, however, French's chief friend among the mighty was Salmon P. Chase, to whom French effectively reached out as a trustee of Wilberforce University and who was the key to the door to the South for French in 1862. French's assiduous cultivation of people in power kept him in the South working for Rufus Saxton, commanders in South Carolina and Georgia in 1865, and Robert K. Scott. Elite friends also initiated French's ill-fated Senate run and conducted it almost without effort on his part, and without those relationships Manuel de Quesada would not have commissioned him as an advocate for Cuban independence. The dormancy of French's relationships with the leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church while he remained in the South, however, and his inability to make connections with the emerging generation of Holiness leaders contributed to his difficulty finding his way in 1868 and the years that followed.

Nevertheless, French would not have been the man he was or done what he did if his friendships in high places had not been secondary to his *ministry in low places*. French's decision to preach as a Methodist was a substantial step down the economic and social ladder, but he proved to be remarkably adept at making meaningful, powerful, transformative, and above all genuine connections with humble folk in rural Ohio. Those experiences in a lowbrow but complex spiritual culture, far from centers of influence either religious or worldly, trained him perfectly for his ministry to blacks on the Sea Islands. Although French was susceptible to looking up the ladder, he was driven by the well-being of those down the ladder. This experience base also kept him effective as an evangelist in small towns in the 1870s while it somewhat hindered his effectiveness with middle-class congregants in New York City in the same decade.

Perhaps French's most important relational "circumstance" was his *supportive spouse*, Austa Malinda French, who nourished his calling and the convoluted path it led him to walk for over three decades. Without Austa, Mansfield might never have sought holiness and never have become willing to give up his stable life for the calling from his youth to preach the gospel. Austa was critically important to Mansfield as a source of moral support, as the behind-the-scenes helper who made his life possible while he ministered, and as an active teammate in education, in pastoral ministry, and most prominently in producing their magazine. She had some outsized flaws, but Mansfield, who loved her dearly, could not have led the life he lived without her. Nevertheless, Austa, with her obsessive determination to regain a magazine of her own in New York and her steadfast refusal to release any properties that she believed God gave her to make her dream come true, was the largest factor in her husband's loss of influence after 1868. For thirty-six years she enabled Mansfield French's wide-ranging ministry, and for eight years she disabled it. To French, leaving his wife permanently for the sake of ministry was an unconscionable contradiction in terms, and he never considered it. Going against her adamantly expressed wishes was also something he avoided at great cost. Thus, when Austa finally put her foot down harder than she ever had in their marriage, she effectively determined their fate.

Turning to the personal qualities that enabled French's multivocational career, it is evident that in every role he played he traded on his *charismatic speaking ability*, whether as an evangelistic schoolteacher, a circuit rider, a preaching college agent, an encourager of freedpeople, a publicist of their needs and triumphs, or a traveling

revivalist. This was enormously helpful in a society in which public speaking was not only a means of conveying information but also a popular form of entertainment. By the nature of the activity, every time French spoke he both performed a job and promoted himself for his next one.

French could not have been productive over a long career without *general good health*, notwithstanding illnesses that laid him low for relatively short periods here and there. Curiously, however, certain *physical and psychological disabilities* proved to be as important to the shape of his career as his overall fitness. Were it not for his persistent eye problem, he would have gone to college instead of leading the revivals at Heath, and he would have stayed at Kenyon and become an Episcopal priest instead of boosting education in Marietta, Granville, and Circleville. He thus would not have considered going into preaching with the Methodists in 1843, a move that set up everything else he did. French's severe bouts of depression in the early 1850s led to his short-lived partnership with evangelist James Caughey and his eventual post at Xenia Female Seminary. Without French's position in Xenia, Wilberforce University would not sit where it does, and without Wilberforce French would not have traveled among Methodists all over the North, especially in New York, and he would not have portentously made the acquaintance of Salmon P. Chase. An injury French suffered at Xenia even influenced his decision to relocate to New York City and devote himself to *Beauty of Holiness* full time.

French was always marked by *restlessness*. In adulthood, he never stayed in a location (except Granville) or assignment (except for publishing *Beauty of Holiness*,

which sometimes ran concurrently with other occupations) for more than three years. Willingness to move was a valuable trait in a Methodist circuit rider, especially one who was assigned to a new circuit every year, but it also disposed French to seek and take advantage of new opportunities wherever he found them. His restlessness finally became too much for Austa, who demanded that he make his home in a place he wanted to leave for good. He was willing to move in another way as well, in that he possessed a relentless *eagerness to jump into areas outside his responsibility*. Although there are hints of it before and after the Civil War—for example, his preference for spreading revival in many churches in the 1850s and 1870s rather than pouring himself into just one—this trait was most obvious in his work in the South. His seeming flightiness exasperated his colleagues there, but it also resulted in thousands of legalized marriages, the authorization to enlist and arm black soldiers, a large amount of useful publicity, life-saving speaking tours in the chaotic aftermath of the war, and many freedpeople getting title to their own land through various means.

French's most attractive moral quality was his *compassion for the needy and oppressed*. This virtue contributed to a multivocational career because French's devotion far surpassed his concern for his own security and comfort. It impelled him to leave his seminary in Circleville to save sinners, and even more dramatically it drove him to leave *Beauty of Holiness* to an uncertain fate in order to suffer for and with the freedpeople for what turned out to be six years.

French possessed what might be called *intelligent activism* that was essential to his entire ministry. As has been noted already in this analysis, French was an educated

man, and he employed his rhetorical skill to speak and write persuasively in everything he did. However, despite his learning and intelligence, French was an activist, not an intellectual. Ideas in and of themselves did not interest him—what he cared about was the spiritual and moral application of ideas to the individual, the church, the nation, and the world. Consequently, when French saw a situation that violated righteousness as he conceived it, his impulse was not to think about it or even talk or write about it but to do something about it. Of course, depending on the circumstances, talking or writing about it might be “doing something about it.” Yet even then French did not measure success by how well he articulated his ideas but rather how greatly they altered people’s behavior to accord with God’s justice. French went to college in Ohio because that was where the greater spiritual need was, which is also why he stayed there to teach when his vision went bad. French’s writing in *Beauty of Holiness* was spare, but it packed a punch, ceaselessly demanding those who claimed to be entirely free from sin not to rest until both the church and the nation were entirely free of the sin of slavery. When French got the opportunity to minister to former slaves directly, he was not about to tell someone else to go in his place—he taught them, married them, and even took enemy fire with them himself. In his entire ministry in the Sea Islands—and then for the short stretch that he advocated for Cuba—French drew from a rich store of thinking about justice and freedom drawn from the Bible and liberal-democratic ideals to fuel his own devotion to the cause and to fire it in others so that laws might be changed, oppressors defeated, and the oppressed liberated.

In keeping with this, another of French’s qualities was his *obsession with*

principles that challenged the status quo. It was not only that French was an activist by temperament; it was that the ideals that he held most dear were inherently disruptive. French was more committed to these principles than to any particular occupation; therefore, they freed him to pursue any occupation that might bring them to practical fruition. French's consistent ideals provided continuity in his tumultuous life; they made the difference between a unified, multivocational career and an aimless sequence of jobs.

There might be any number of world-altering principles that drive multivocational ministers. The following were Mansfield French's:

- *Education for radical transformation.* French believed that education's purpose was to foster radical life-change in students and likewise that education was critical for that change to take place. As a nineteen-year-old teacher at Heath his objective was to alter both hearts and minds, especially to use the training of the mind in an evangelical setting to bring about a conversion of the heart that would result in complete consecration of life to God's will. Among freedpeople, French's vision of education did not involve conversion, but it did involve a radical transformation from the habits and attitudes of slavery to those of a respectable, free, and self-reliant people.
- *Full freedom for the oppressed.* French was convinced that those in bondage could and should become entirely free immediately. Sinners could not only be pardoned and not only be freed from the necessity of sinning, but they could also be freed of the desire to sin, and by faith that blessing could be received right now. French was likewise convinced that black slaves must be freed

immediately and unconditionally, and he had no doubt that they had the capacity to thrive in freedom. At the same time, his robust conception of freedom included thorough education, marriage rights, full participation in religious leadership, suffrage and access to political office, and a measure of economic self-sufficiency through land ownership to limit wage dependency. French demanded the church and the government to provide these at once to the first generation emerging from slavery in order to set the entire race on equal footing with whites.

- *Full humanity of all races.* French considered black slaves to be oppressed because he considered them fully human—not inhuman, subhuman, quasi-human, or potentially human, but inherently human. Given the ignorance and squalor in which slaves on the Sea Islands were kept, their foreign physical appearance, dialect, and customs, and a white society that presupposed cultural superiority rather than cultural relativism, French's commitment to this principle was profoundly countercultural. He proved it by his actions, not only as a champion of justice between races who was willing to bear opprobrium for blacks' sake but also by delighting in worshiping with them and welcoming black preachers into the Methodist traveling connection.
- *A perfect present for the perfect future.* Even in French's Episcopalian years he was soaked in the Yankee evangelical vision of a fully converted, unceasingly revived church and nation whose spiritual and political blessings would overflow to bring all nations into the Millennium prior to the return of Christ.

When French became convinced of entire sanctification in the present life and experienced it, he tasted future perfection in the present, which was necessary for the perfect future to emerge. French's twofold conviction that perfection was inexorably coming but that people must receive it now fed his abolitionism and providentialist understanding of the Civil War and Reconstruction just as much as it fed his passionate preaching in the Holiness Movement.

French's ministry was also fed by a highly—even dangerously—supple *typological outlook on the Old Testament*. French was steeped in a narrative complex capable of enormously flexible application that enabled him to make sense of a wide variety of ministry situations and challenges and his own role in them. It especially enabled him to make impactful, meaningful connections both with rural and small-town whites in Ohio and also with Southern blacks emerging from slavery. In addition, French's unending rumination on Old Testament narratives produced in him *unshakable faith in God's power* to save and to provide. Every vocational transition entailed some level of risk, in some cases fairly extreme. French took the plunge because he was sure that God would not call him to a task only to abandon him. French went for long periods not knowing how he would feed and educate his family and pay his debts; although some of his distress was his own fault, his confidence in God's sustenance was never confounded. French exhibited a rare blend of restlessness and persistence—even though he bounced among a diverse array of activities and never did one thing for very long, he rarely quit anything because it was too hard. To the contrary, the stiffer the opposition, the more stubbornly he dug in. He attempted difficult things in the constant faith that he was

aligning himself with God's intentions, which the Almighty would never allow to fail.

Finally, mysterious as they are, it must be admitted that French's ministry was powered by two pivotal *spiritual experiences*. One was his conversion as a teenager in Bennington, Vermont, an event about which we know little, although its effects were plainly seen in Heath. The other came in Circleville in 1843, an experience that French considered to be perfection in love. From around the end of his life to the present—though with roots in French's own lifetime²⁷—some Christians (including myself) called such an experience “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Whatever it was, it changed him forever. It sharply altered the course of his life at that juncture, but it did more: it turned him into a dynamo and energized him for everything he did thereafter, all the way to the beloved sinner whom he sought to save with his dying words.

Toward an Applicable Theory of Formation for Multivocational Ministry

This study is intended as an early step toward a framework that could help some professional ministers to serve with effectiveness and distinction in diverse fields over the course of a career. In order to construct this framework fully, at least four more steps need to be taken.

First, this study is an examination of one minister with influential accomplishments in diverse endeavors and an investigation of the personal qualities and external conditions that made his career possible. Yet if these lists of qualities and conditions are to approach universal applicability—that is, if we are to get closer to a set

²⁷ See pp. 98, 107.

of features that may operate in the lives of ministers in many ages, places, and cultures—we need to conduct the same sort of investigation into the lives of other ministers with diverse achievements and compare them to Mansfield French. Some candidates can be found among French’s friends and acquaintances—men like Heman Dyer and Erastus Otis Haven. This may also be a useful and intriguing angle by which to take a fresh look at Dwight L. Moody and Billy Graham, each of whom in his own manner and time was an institution-builder as well as an evangelist. In order to ensure universality we ought to consider persons from vastly different ages as well (for example, Pope Gregory the Great), and we should also look for comparison figures in a variety of cultures. At the same time, however, we must remain open to the possibility that a universally applicable set of qualities and conditions for all ministers in all places at all times does not exist—or that if it does exist it is a good deal less helpful than a longer, more textured, more robust set of qualities and conditions that applies more closely to the narrower circle of ministers of a particular cultural setting. However, we are unlikely to know what is possible and what is helpful without first conducting the comparative studies.

Second, once a reliable set of qualities and conditions for multivocational ministry has been gathered from historical examples (or at least once the project has made substantial progress), research ought to be done to discern how prevalent these qualities and conditions are in our time. Of a set of a thousand professional ministers worldwide (or nationwide or even citywide), how many have a particular quality borne by a multivocational minister? How many possess all the qualities? How prevalent are the conditions that foster multivocational ministers? Where are those conditions found with

the highest degree of overlap and concentration? Answering these questions requires a range of social-scientific tools that vary according to the quality or condition studied, whether it is the physical fitness of the minister, the minister's social standing, the economic conditions of the minister's family of origin or location of service, or any other.

Third, once we have a good idea of the qualities and conditions that facilitate multivocational ministry, we may investigate whether these may be cultivated deliberately, and if so, by what methods. On the individual side, for ministers who do not possess these qualities the question is whether they may be produced; for those who do possess them the question is whether they may be intentionally developed, sharpened, or refined. Developmental psychology, educational theory, vocational counseling, and spiritual theology may need to be brought to bear to answer this question and craft techniques for personal cultivation. On the environmental side, although some conditions—perhaps the most powerful ones—may be utterly outside the influence of those who are called to train ministers, some conditions might be cultivated by Christian formation institutions including churches, under the belief that the formation structure today, whatever it is, brings forth ministers with certain qualities and opportunities a generation or two in the future. Of course, an essential part of developing such strategies and techniques is testing whether they work, and that itself may by nature be the work of a lifetime.

Fourth, if the qualities and conditions for multivocational ministry *could* be cultivated, *should* they be cultivated? Although this is the final question, it should probably be the first one considered. There are theological presuppositions at work here

about the Potter who works the clay. For example, how detailed is God's disposition (or predisposition) of individuals' life trajectories? To what extent does God employ consciously willing human agents to bring such trajectories about, if at all? And then there are ethical questions of a spiritual kind that follow on the theological ones. For example, how much direct effort should one exert to form oneself? Is becoming a multivocational minister an objective that deserves a significant portion of that effort compared to other worthy personal-formation objectives (e.g., replacing sinful habits)? In the broad view, do we need more multivocational ministers than we have? Is an effort to produce more multivocational ministers an act of faith that such is God's desire to be accomplished through his church, or is it an act of doubt that God is seeing that the right people be born into the world? In short, is it a worthy goal to become or to produce another Mansfield French? Or is it better simply to thank God for one when one comes?

APPENDIX

MULTIVOCATIONAL MINISTERS ENCOUNTER MANSFIELD FRENCH

A draft of the foregoing thesis was submitted to three modern multivocational ministers—Christian ministers who have exerted broad influence among diverse occupations—who are currently at a late phase of their careers or in retirement. These ministers considered points of contact between Mansfield French's vocational journey and their own, giving special attention to the personal qualities and external circumstances outlined in chapter five as they have impacted these ministers' own lives. Their thoughts were collected for this study through phone and e-mail interviews.¹ Summaries of the careers of the three ministers follow.

The Reverend Dan Buttry has served as the pastor of two American Baptist churches. Dorchester Temple Baptist Church in Dorchester, Massachusetts, which Buttry served in the 1970s and '80s, was a struggling, white congregation in a multiracial, urban neighborhood. Buttry led the church into racial integration and renewal and wrote about the experience in his book *Bringing Your Church Back to Life: Beyond Survival Mentality*.² Through his urban ministry experiences, Buttry became a peace activist and teacher of conflict transformation strategies, serving on the staffs of American Baptist National Ministries and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. Currently American Baptist International Ministries' global consultant for peace and justice, Buttry travels the world to teach skills to on-the-ground peacemakers from a biblical basis.

¹ Dan Buttry, e-mail message to author, December 31, 2014; Jay Kesler, telephone interview by author, January 7, 2015; LeRoy Lawson, e-mail message to author, January 11, 2015.

² Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1988.

Buttry has also played substantial roles in peacemaking himself, notably in the framing of a historic peace agreement among warring parties in Nagaland, India. Buttry is also the author or editor of several other books, including his memoir, *Peace Warrior: A Memoir from the Front*.³

When Jay Kesler graduated from Taylor University in 1958, he had already logged many hours preaching as an evangelist under the auspices of Youth for Christ in rural Indiana. Kesler continued serving with Youth for Christ International, eventually rising to become president of the organization in 1973. In 1985 Kesler was called back to his alma mater to serve as its president, a position that he held until retiring in 2000; he currently holds the position of president emeritus. By the end of his tenure, Taylor was consistently ranked as one of the top Midwestern liberal arts colleges. Upon retirement, Kesler served for a short time as interim pastor of Upland (Ind.) Community Church. For thirty-five years Kesler was a board member of *Christianity Today* magazine. He is the author of over thirty books, mostly on youth ministry and parenting.

Dr. LeRoy Lawson planted a church at age twenty-one while earning his bachelor of theology degree. While serving there and then at a succession of other ministry assignments, he completed two degrees in English, which he taught at the high school and college levels, and later earned a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt. In 1979 Lawson became the senior pastor of Central Christian Church in Mesa, Arizona, a church with an average attendance of 490 that grew to 4,500 during his twenty-year pastorate. Meanwhile, in 1990 Lawson became president of Pacific Christian College (later Hope International

³ Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2012.

University). In the 1960s Lawson served as candidate secretary of Christian Missionary Fellowship International and remained on its board, for a time as chairman, until 2004, when he took on his present role of international consultant for the organization. In 2012 Lawson became professor of Christian ministries at Emmanuel Christian Seminary, where he directs its doctor of ministry program as one of his duties. Lawson is a columnist and the author of several books.

Of the nine external circumstances and eleven personal qualities that facilitated Mansfield French's multivocational ministry, several emerged as common themes in Buttry's, Kesler's, and Lawson's careers (Table 1). Although Lawson was the only one to mention *general good health* explicitly as a factor, Buttry and Kesler make no mention of any major health problems that limited their activity for an extended period of time. Interestingly, although *physical and psychological disabilities* did not prove to be a factor for Kesler, Buttry stated that the intimate pains involved in parenting a mentally ill child fed his ministry to hurting people in unexpected ways. The impact was even greater for Lawson, who as a severe asthmatic as a child was kept out of sports and buried himself in books and who, like French, was kept from being qualified for the foreign mission field because of his health problem and was diverted into other activities.

All three men lauded their *supportive spouses* in the highest terms as critical to their ability to manage such a volume of responsibilities and travel. Their wives have believed in their ministries as much as they have themselves. In Buttry's case in particular, this has involved active side-by-side work with his wife in justice ministry in urban and international settings.

Table 1. Factors in French's Multivocational Career Exhibited in Three Other Ministers' Careers

	Buttry	Kesler	Lawson
population expansion		✓	
settlement expansion		✓	
vast social change		✓	
education*	✓	✓	✓
money	✓		
friends in (or from) other places			
friends in high places			✓
ministry in low places*	✓	✓	✓
supportive spouse*	✓	✓	✓
charismatic speaking ability		✓	
general good health*	✓	✓	✓
physical and psychological disabilities	✓		✓
restlessness			
eagerness to jump into areas outside his responsibility			✓
compassion for the needy and oppressed*	✓	✓	✓
intelligent activism*	✓	✓	✓
obsession with principles that challenged the status quo	✓		✓
typological outlook on the Old Testament			
unshakable faith in God's power	✓	✓	
spiritual experiences	✓	✓	

All three ministers spoke of the value of *education* for the diversity of their ministries. Buttry was the only one to mention the privilege of parental financial support as critical for his education as it was for French's. Kesler and Lawson, both of the previous generation, could not rely on their fathers for help for varying reasons and had

to scrape and pray for funds to make it through college. Buttry's educational path was conventional for his era: undergraduate study and theological seminary (at Gordon-Conwell). Lawson's was more unusual; after receiving education for ministry, he earned his bachelor's degree in English and started teaching high school as a fallback in case his precarious church plant did not survive. One degree led to another, still as a safety net, until he found himself as a college professor and then administrator with a Ph.D. and discovered that academia had evolved from a fallback into a full-fledged second career. Kesler's education is perhaps the most unconventional of all. He never earned more than a bachelor's degree, although he has been awarded an honorary doctorate. Not unlike French, Kesler was summoned to a college presidency despite his lack of academic qualifications because of his demonstrated, charismatic skill at organizational leadership, fundraising, and making powerful connections with young people. Nevertheless, Kesler was (and remains) a prodigious reader and thus carried the intellectual heft to be credible as the head of a liberal arts college.

In this connection, all three men resonated strongly with the quality of *intelligent activism*. All of them are sharp readers and writers, and two of them have served for years in academia in some capacity. Yet none of them gravitated toward intellectual pursuits as an end unto themselves. Their primary sense of calling has been about Christian service to persons who may not be classed as intellectuals by anyone, and their primary vocational output has been in shaping people's lives "on the ground." Closely related to this are the quality of *compassion for the needy and oppressed* and the deliberately chosen circumstance of *ministry in low places*. Lawson started out as a local-church

pastor and has served as such for most of his adulthood. Further, he writes, “I have what I think of as a visceral aversion to bullying in any form—but it’s not merely visceral is it? I think it’s of the essence of the Gospel.” Lawson chose to get his doctorate at Vanderbilt in part to engage in the Civil Rights Movement in Tennessee, although he found that it had largely ended in that location by the time he arrived.

Kesler’s and Buttry’s engagements with peace-and-justice causes have been more outspoken. Kesler has walked a complicated political path from his childhood up. By the 1960s he had become a youth evangelist of some renown and received invitations to speak outside the Midwest, including in the Deep South, where he was appalled to find that “people could trust Christ and use the ‘n’-word every other sentence.” Kesler remembered the social theory that his socialist father drilled him in as a youngster—“I realized my dad was not insane,” he says—and began talking about systemic sin. Kesler identified himself with the rising Evangelical Left; in chorus with his friend Oregon senator Mark O. Hatfield and others, Kesler told evangelicals that although preaching a social gospel without a personal gospel is truncated, the reverse is also.

Soon afterward, Buttry began his ministerial career in a Boston shattered by division over interneighborhood busing to integrate the city’s schools. Over the decades he demonstrated against the Reagan administration’s investment in and deployment of advanced nuclear weapons, facilitated gang summits in violent American cities, and brokered peace deals abroad. Buttry “believe[s] fundamental change happens from the grass-roots up” and that “a lot of what French accomplished was because of his capacity to get closer to those grassroots than many of his missionary contemporaries did.”

It is striking how Buttry, Kesler, and Lawson all cite deliberate downward mobility as essential to their careers as multivocational ministers. One would expect that landing positions of influence in a diversity of arenas requires friends in high places, but such has not been the case for these men. True, Lawson credits a great deal of his vocational path to the support and influence of good mentors further up and ahead of himself. For Buttry and Kesler, however, although both have had notable interactions with powerful people around the world— Kesler, like French, had a conversation in the White House with a sitting president (Bill Clinton)—such contacts have been *effects* of their ministry paths, not causes. Indeed, Buttry deliberately chose to pastor a deteriorating church in a violent neighborhood after seminary and has continued to gravitate toward the marginalized ever since. Kesler’s story is especially striking. Soon after he became a Christian out of an antireligious, working-class home as a teenager, he perceived a Northern evangelical inner ring composed of upper-middle-class families with ties to Wheaton College. Knowing that he could easily win allies and support at Wheaton, he instead enrolled at Taylor, then a Holiness school looked at askance by evangelical/fundamentalist elites, with the intention that any success he gained in life would clearly be seen to be God’s handiwork and not the fruit of his connections. Kesler began his ascent to the high echelons of American evangelicalism by preaching at 152 week-long revival meetings over four years at tiny clapboard churches dotting rural Indiana.

Although Lawson’s downward trajectory was less dramatic, this son of a grocer who kept working in stores through the early phase of his education and career testifies to taking three pay cuts when moving to new jobs over the course of his life, and “they were

all good for me.” “I know that it’s possible to have a highly successful career by singlemindedly pursuing that success,” he continues. “I just don’t know how to reconcile that ambition with serving Jesus.” He laments that compassion for the needy and oppressed is “not [a quality] that seems to be essential in our time and culture” in order to be considered a successful minister. “I’ve known too many ‘successful’ pastors who seem deficient in this characteristic. They are kingdom builders, administrators and leaders, but not compassionate pastors.”

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